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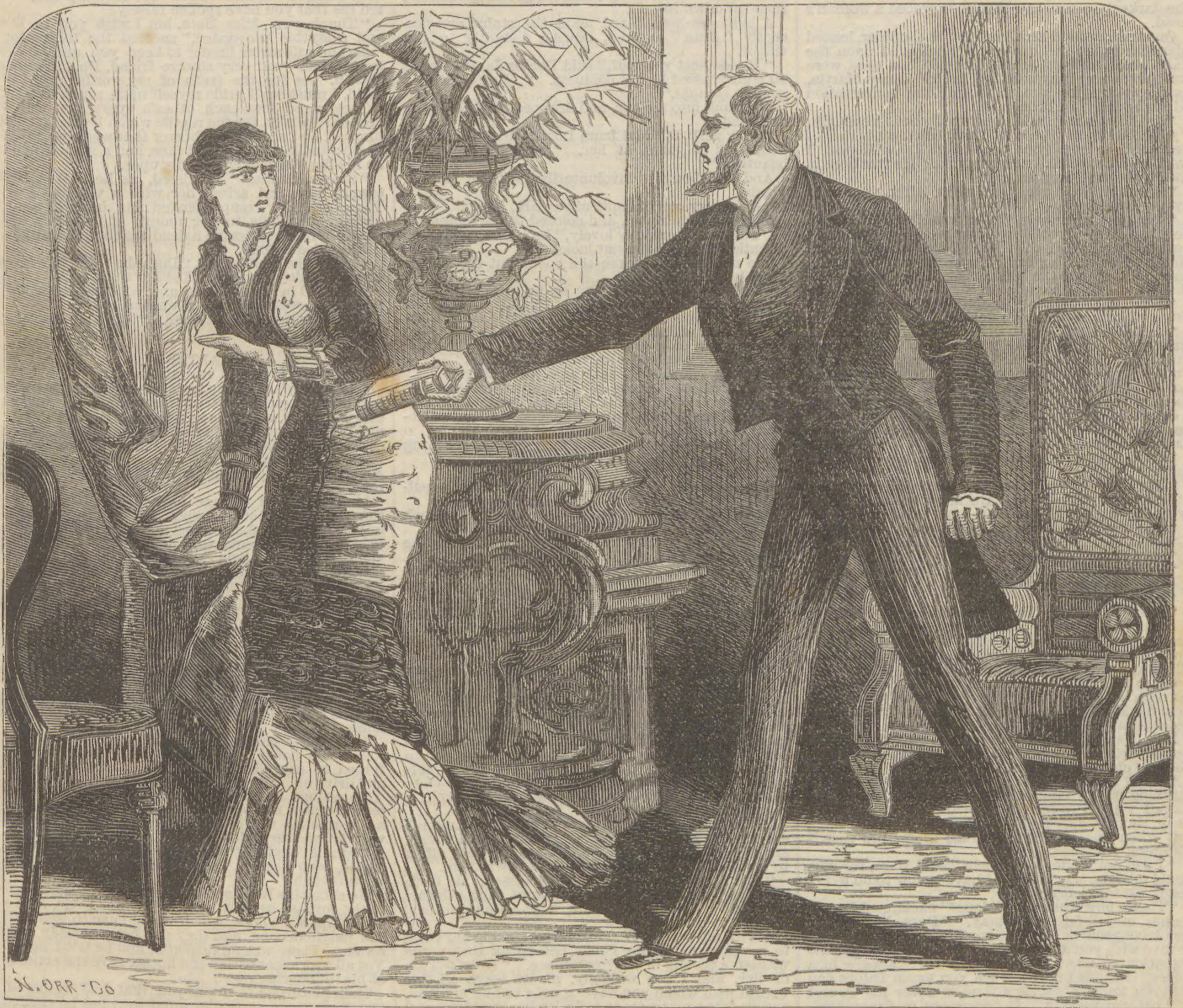
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"PLACE YOUR HAND UPON THIS BOOK," SAID HE, "AND WHEN I REPEAT THE CONDITIONS, SWEAR THAT YOU WILL FAITHFULLY ABIDE BY THEM."

One Woman's Heart; or, Saved from the Street.

BY GEORGE S. KAIME.

CHAPTER I.

DOCTOR JAMES MARTIN.

THE silver plate glittered in the sunlight and glimmered in the gaslight, yet told no tale of what was passing within that marble mansion. Ladies, in their silks and velvets, passed and looked at it; gentlemen read it; beggars spelled out the name, and turned away with a sigh; and policemen wondered who he was. But none could tell.

Yet he was no myth. There was a Doctor James Martin; a tall, slender man, past middle age, with sandy hair and whiskers, never trimmed, and an eye never at rest. He passed in and out through that broad entrance, but was "never at home."

Behind that silver door-plate, which, with the marble front, covered a multitude of sins, Doctor James Martin ate his food, drank his wine, smoked his cigars, slept and plotted.

To the right, after passing the entrance, was a door, with the word "OFFICE" inscribed upon it in gilt letters. This was Doctor James Martin's room. None ever entered it without his permission, and very few ever received that permission. Sam, the doctor's servant and body-guard, always crossed the threshold as if in momentary expectation of

an onset from some hidden foe; and always left the room with his face to the danger, if danger there were.

But there was nothing about the room itself to excite fear. It was a large, square apartment, with the softest of carpets on the floor, the glossiest of paper on the walls, and the richest of rosewood furnishing. One side was occupied by a mammoth book-case, well filled, and a cabinet of vials and decanters—a backer to the silver plate on the door. Suspended against the walls were paintings and chromos, well selected, and here and there a statuette, or the bust of some departed hero. In the center of the room stood a great square table covered with books and papers, bottles and glasses, and cigar boxes and stands, never empty. In the center of the table was an enormous *hookah* of the most curious workmanship, its long, flexible stem reaching over to an arm-chair, deep, soft and easy.

One evening, in the spring of 1860, Doctor James Martin graced this room with his presence; also this soft easy-chair. He was sitting there very quietly, but those restless eyes—albeit they were shaded by the greenest of green spectacles—were looking at every thing within range; and if they were at rest for one brief moment, it was when he turned them upon the face of a woman sitting at the opposite side of the table.

And it was no wonder that this face could hold his gaze, for it was beautiful beyond compare. A dark, tropical face, with eyes blacker than midnight clouds; lips full, ripe and crimson; and a wealth of the darkest, softest hair that ever graced a woman's head.

One white, round arm, bare to the shoulder, leaned upon the table; the queenly head leaned upon the hand, small and white; and the lustrous eyes were watching every movement of Doctor James Martin, as she waited for him to resume the conversation which he had just broken off.

"Let me see," said Doctor James, musingly; "your father has been at Arrancourt a number of years. How long it has been since I saw Moses! I wonder if he would know me now? He was here in the city when I went away."

"He went to Arrancourt soon after you went away," said the lady.

"Yes, yes. Norman Vinton was fortunate when he secured my brother to look after the estate. I am well acquainted with Mr. Vinton; and, although Moses knew nothing of it, it was through my influence that he got the place. Mr. Vinton writes me that he will be at home soon."

"Why, uncle James!" exclaimed the lady, in surprise, "Norman Vinton is dead."

"A strange mistake," said Doctor James, with a smile that seemed to say, "I pity you for your ignorance." "His wife died. I was in Italy at the time. Poor Norman was nearly crazed. I fear that he has not quite recovered from the shock. He has been roaming, nobody knows where, ever since. He lost a daughter, too, about the same time. But, he will be at home some time this month. When do you go back to Arrancourt?"

"I did intend to remain in the city a month or more."

"Very likely," said Doctor James, abstractedly. "Vinton has a son living. He must be about twenty-two or three. How old are you, Dora?"

"Twenty, uncle," she replied, frankly.

"Bless me! how time flies. And Ella?"

"Two years younger."

"So she is. I remember now. I presume you intend to remain at Arrancourt?"

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, yes. Henry Vinton is not married, I believe. A fine-looking young man he must be. Resembles his mother. Please pass me that paper, Dora. Thank you; I want to look at the shipping-list a moment. Bless me! the steamer is due Saturday. You say you are going back to Arrancourt to-morrow? Well, you can tell your father to have every thing in readiness for Mr. Vinton's arrival, if he has not already received a letter from him."

Dora Martin did not correct him as to the time of her departure for Arrancourt, for, strangely enough, she had changed her mind.

"I will have a carriage for you in time for the morning train," continued Doctor James, "and perhaps I will go to the depot with you. I am very busy, though, and really ought to be at work now; but when one has friends to see them, the case is different, you know."

"I will not hinder you, uncle," said Dora, for who could mistake the hint. "I have much to do to get ready for my journey."

"There, now what have I done!" exclaimed Doctor James, in well-feigned dismay. "Dora, how pretty you have grown! I do believe Henry Vinton will fall in love with you at first sight. But you must pay no attention to what I say, Dora. I am always in a hurry. But, as I may not see you again before you go—you know a doctor's time is never his own—I will bid you good-by. It does seem so funny that, after all the pleasure I have anticipated from this visit, you only stay with me one day. But I am detaining you. Tell Moses that I shall come down when I can find time; and surely one ought to take time to see one's only brother. I will, too. Good-by, Dora."

"There's ambition for you," said Doctor James, after Dora had left the room. "What eyes! They couldn't be prettier but there's a devil behind them! How they snapped when I gave her an invitation to go back to Arrancourt! It was rather a cool dismissal, but she wanted to go; yet I was half afraid to do it, and do not know now but that I have made an enemy. Well, well, it is not the first one; and it doesn't matter much, for Doctor James Martin will soon be among the things that were. It will be a

rich joke, and a dangerous one to me if any one happens to see the point of it. But I'll risk it. I haven't plotted these two years to give up now, when every thing is so favorable."

He moved up to the table and wrote a brief note. Then he rung the bell.

"Sam," said he to the servant, "I am going away. You see this note?"

"Yes, sir."

"You saw the lady, my niece?"

"Yes, sir."

"Give the note to her in the morning, and say that I was called away. In the morning, remember."

"Yes, sir."

"And see that she has a carriage ready for the morning train, south."

"Yes, sir."

"And have my horse saddled at once."

"Yes, sir."

"Go."

"Yes, sir."

Doctor James now sought his coat, hat and gloves, and when the horse was brought to the door he was ready to spring into the saddle.

He crossed the ferry to Jersey City, and a ride of half a mile brought him to a dwelling scarcely less imposing than his own on Sixth avenue.

His ring was quickly answered by the servant, who showed him into the parlor.

"Send Meta to me at once."

He adjusted his cravat; also his green spectacles; then sat down to wait.

A light step was heard upon the stairs, and presently "Meta" entered, bowing distantly to her visitor.

"Please seat yourself," said Doctor James, not at all embarrassed by her coldness. "*I have come for a purpose to-night.*"

She sunk into a chair, and dropped her head upon her hands.

"How very different from Dora," thought Doctor James, as he gazed at her. "Yes, she is far more beautiful."

And his thoughts involuntarily took the form of words.

"How very, very beautiful you are, Meta."

She started in alarm, and colored to the temples.

"You are exquisitely lovely," he added, paying no attention to her indignant looks.

She now arose to leave the room, but the doctor forcibly detained her.

"Does it then anger you so to speak of your beauty?" he sneered. "Well, I'll not mention it. But I have come for a *purpose* to-night. When I last honored you with a visit, you remember that I promised to come only once more. This is the time, unless, indeed, you have altered your decision."

"Which I have not," said Meta, haughtily.

"No, I did not expect it. I merely mentioned it to satisfy any little doubts I might have. But, you know, Meta, that one cannot bear such disappointment without some little *revenge*."

Meta gave a quick, startled look, but the mocking face revealed nothing of the thoughts within.

"Tell me the worst at once!" she implored.

But Doctor James looked coldly down into the pallid, beseeching face, and went on in his own way.

"When I took you from the streets—when I took you from the woman you called mother—"

Ah! how he gloried in torturing her, now that he knew that he had nothing more to hope for.

"My mother!" she whispered, reverently. "What of her? Oh! Doctor James, you have some pity? Tell me of her!"

But he had no pity. What cared he for the beautiful face upturned to his so full of supplication? What, though she crazed? what, though she died? Ah! *died?*

"When I brought you here, Meta," he went on, "it was merely an act of kindness; but, as you grew in beauty, I grew to like you. I gave you every advantage that wealth could bestow, but I have, to some extent, deprived you of your liberty. It was because of my selfish love. I wanted you all to myself. But you have rejected me; you have shown ingratitude; and now I turn you into the streets again—back into the streets where I found you—into the streets—the streets! Do you hear? without a home, a name, or a friend!"

His voice had risen to an angry pitch, between a shout and a shriek, and Meta, shrinking with dread, and trembling with fear, made one desperate effort to break away from him, but his hold was firm.

"The streets—the streets!" he hissed, his teeth gnashing, and great purple seams of rage athwart his face. "Into the streets, with—your mother! Ha! ha!"

"With my mother?" asked Meta, sinking her voice to a whisper, for she could not speak that name without a feeling of holy reverence. "Only tell me of her, and I can willingly, gladly leave all this wealth with which you have sought to buy my love, and go into the streets to toil with her and for her."

Doctor James gave her a look that froze all her anticipated joy to the direst dread.

"Remember that it is your own seeking," said he. "But I shall require your oath that, whatever may happen, your lips shall be sealed in relation to your past life—to me—to everything, from the moment you leave this house. You shall be as one awakening from a deep sleep, knowing nothing of the past."

"I will swear," said Meta.

He took a Bible from the table. He knew that Meta held that book sacred.

"Place your hand upon this book," said he, "and when I repeat the conditions, swear that you will faithfully abide by them."

In a mocking tone he proceeded; and Meta, holding the matter in too sacred a light to be influenced

by his levity, solemnly repeated the words after him. When it was all finished to his satisfaction, Meta looked up hopefully into his face.

"Do not keep me waiting," she implored.

He laughed derisively.

"What a pity that I have not pleasant words to whisper in your ear; but, you know I must have my little revenge. I will not harm the body. Oh, no; I do not brave the law. My revenge will strike deeper than that. It shall hang a menacing terror over you, until you are carried to your grave! It shall blast all hope, crush all pride, and burden your heart with such wretched misery, that you will call for death! You will be shunned by the good, derided by the wicked, and become a thing hateful even to yourself."

He laughed tauntingly, and bent his malignant gaze upon Meta, who stood gazing at him, bewildered by his horrid mockery.

"Tell me!" she gasped.

And putting his lips close to her ear, he whispered his revenge.

Alas for Meta! It was like a thunder-burst, which deafens and tortures, but does not kill. The muscles grew rigid; the blood seemed stagnant; the eyes were stony; the lips deathly white, and the brain in such a whirl, that she caught at the table for support.

"False as your own false heart!" she said, in a husky voice. "Satan himself could not conceive a more fiendish untruth! I will not believe it. Coward! to seek such revenge! Oh, take my life, but tell me that you have spoken falsely!"

"Thank you, Miss Meta, but I wish you to live and *enjoy* this knowledge," sneered the tormentor. "No one will strive harder to keep you out of the grave than your very sincere friend, Doctor James Martin. As for the truth of my words, my dear child, I must say I pride myself upon my veracity."

They gazed into each other's eyes; she, with a deeper repulsion for the reptile which he had proved himself, and a sickening horror that was worse than death; and he, with a livid face, and a wicked smile on his lips, fatal as the deadly upas.

"Sworn enemies!" he hissed, as he took a step toward her, and seized her with a vise-like grip. Then, ere she comprehended his intentions, he pressed a sponge to her mouth and nostrils, and waited until she became a dead weight in his arms.

He smiled grimly.

"Fool!" he muttered. "Does she think this is all done for paltry revenge? Let her think so."

He raised her in his arms and bore her out of the house to a close carriage in waiting.

"Drive! drive!" he shouted. "We have no time to waste now."

CHAPTER II.

OUT IN THE STREETS.

A good day's journey from the city was the thriving little seaport town of Willhampton. It was an everyday sort of a place, never having any excitement more startling than a traveling circus, or the capsizing of a fishing-smack; but it was destined to have a first-class sensation—a mystery of appearance and disappearance, that the shrewdest could not fathom.

In a little red cottage down by the beach, lived the widow Morehouse. Since her first appearance in Willhampton, she had led a quiet, secluded life, holding no intercourse with her neighbors, and only venturing abroad long enough to purchase the few necessities that her simple mode of life required. As a consequence, she was looked upon with some suspicion; but she ignored all this, and went on in her own quiet way, biding her time to make plain the mystery which shrouded her life.

But one morning the postman knocked in vain at the little red cottage. It was something so unusual for her to be away, and he thought it worthy of note; but he had no time to waste; so he slipped the letter under the door, and passed on, telling wherever he went, that the widow Morehouse was not at home.

The grocer came along for his weekly order, and found the house still closed; and the baker was forced to carry his steaming rolls back to the cart and drive on.

As no one had seen her leave the house, her absence excited much comment; and toward evening a consultation was held by those in the immediate vicinity of the widow's home. They decided that something ought to be done, and notified the constable, who seemed to be the only public officer within reach.

He shook his head mysteriously, and walking over to the cottage, as he was in duty bound to do, beat a tattoo upon the door, which would have roused half the neighborhood, had they not been already wide awake. There was no response, and he tried again. Yet all was silent within the house, save the echoing of his thundering raps.

Then he turned to the crowd that had gathered, and made more particular inquiries; but he elicited no further information, except that one man was very positive that some time in the night he heard a carriage drive up and go away again.

"Well, my friends," said the constable, putting on a very knowing face, which became him, "well, it is my belief that there has been foul play here, and I feel it my duty to burst in the door. Bring me a crowbar."

The required lever was soon placed in his hands, and after a short speech to the admiring crowd, in which he dwelt largely upon his duty, he forced an entrance.

The people now surged up to the door to see the horrid sight which all believed was there, but the officer, in the name of the law, ordered them back. Then he called two men out of the crowd, and leav-

ing one to guard the entrance, he took the other in with him.

He reappeared almost immediately, and to have answered all the questions put to him would have required a wiser head than his. But he was equal to the occasion. With a majestic wave of the hand, he commanded silence, and called for his wife.

The good woman was near at hand, and with a pardonable pride, soon disappeared within the mysterious portals of the red cottage.

Again the constable came to the door, and called for a doctor, "without a lay."

The half-frantic people now crowded the man at the door so hard that he was obliged to call for assistance; and when the doctor arrived, he found much difficulty in reaching the house.

He had heard all that was known of the affair, and exhibited as much curiosity as any of them; but he was not prepared for what he saw. Instead of the ghastly form of the widow Morehouse, weltering in her blood, he found, lying on the bed, the insensible form of a beautiful girl.

"Mercy! what is this?" he exclaimed, hastening to the bedside, and taking one of the limp hands in his own.

"You know as much about it as we do, doctor. Is she dead?"

"Dugged. I will give her something that will soon bring her to."

The medicine had the desired effect; and the girl opened her eyes, and stared wildly about her.

"Where am I?" she asked, rising on her elbow.

"Who are you?"

"We were searching for the widow Morehouse, and found you," said the constable.

"Morehouse! I know nothing of her. Have I been dreaming?"

"Probably," said the doctor. "Now, can you tell me who you are?"

"Oh, yes; I am Meta," she replied, in a dazed sort of a way.

Yes, it was Meta, turned into the streets again, without a home, a name, or a friend; the victim of Dr. James Martin's "little revenge."

"But how came you here?" asked the doctor.

"I cannot tell," said Meta, trying to put her bewildered thoughts into shape. Then she remembered Doctor James, and, with a shudder, turned her face to the wall, and burst into tears.

The constable's wife looked pityingly upon her, but she could not understand it. All at once she started in alarm.

"She has fainted, doctor!"

"Then we must carry her into the air," said the doctor. "It is too close and gloomy here."

The wondering crowd outside were all huddled up around the door, but when the doctor appeared with Meta in his arms, they drew back awe-stricken. The beautiful, ghost-like form seemed to them to have come from another world, and they gave her a wide berth.

The cool air soon revived the poor girl, and she stood up, hiding her face from the gaping crowd.

"Take me back to the house," she implored. "I can not bear the gaze of all these people. They will stare me crazy. Take me out of sight."

"Come with me," said a kindly voice; and Charles Matthews, the banker of Willhampton, made his way to Meta's side. "Come with me, little one."

Though Meta did not see his face, she knew by the voice that she had nothing to fear, and she allowed him to lead her away to his princely home.

And all the while she was thinking of the awful words which Doctor James whispered in her ear—the awful doom to which they consigned her.

"Why, Charles!" exclaimed the banker's wife, when she met him with Meta at the door, "what have you here?"

"A child that needs a friend," said the banker, as he gave Meta up to his wife.

"She shall have two of them, shall she not, Charles?" said Mrs. Matthews, taking Meta into the house.

"Yes, mother," replied the banker, as he passed out the gate, to return to the widow's cottage, to learn what he could of the mysterious affair.

Meta looked up into the kindly face of Mrs. Matthews with a hopeful smile.

"Friends! He told me that I never should have any again."

"Who, child, told you such a falsehood?"

"Oh, what have I done?" exclaimed Meta, in dismay. "Please don't ask me any more. My name is Meta, and that is all I must tell you. When are you going to drive me into the streets again?"

Mrs. Matthews held up her hands in horror.

"We are not heathens!" said she. Then she became heartily ashamed of herself, and clasping the poor child to her bosom, she said:

"Never, Meta! you shall stay with us always."

"Oh, no!" said Meta, sadly, yet nestling closer to the good woman. "That cannot be. You do not know all, and I must not tell you. If you will let me stay to-night, I will go away in the morning."

"No, no, my child!" said Mrs. Matthews. "Would you not like to stay with me?"

"Oh, yes; but I must not. I must go away where I can forget every thing."

"Tell me your troubles," said the banker's wife, again drawing Meta to her. "You want a friend?"

"So much, Mrs. Matthews; but even to a friend I cannot unburden my heart. I cannot break my promise. You will not ask me?"

"But you will tell me your name?"

"I know none but Meta."

"Strange; and you do not know how you came to be in Mrs. Morehouse's cottage?"

"I must know nothing of the past," she replied, sadly. "Only the future is open to me, and what a future!"

"Then, Meta, we take you as you are," said the banker's wife, impressed by her simplicity, that, whatever the wrong, this poor child was not to blame. "Knowing nothing—asking nothing of the past, Meta."

"Oh, will you?" exclaimed Meta, joyfully. Then the old look of despair came back to her face.

"You know not what you are saying, my dear friend. I must not listen to you. I will go away in the morning, and you must forget you ever saw me."

"We will wait until morning comes, dear."

CHAPTER III.

THE BANKER'S WARD.

THE banker was puzzled. So was Willhampton generally. Puzzled at Mrs. Morehouse's disappearance, and at Meta's no less strange appearance.

A detective came down from the city. He looked the red cottage all over; asked innumerable questions; and worried poor Meta nearly to distraction. Then he went away again. But he left his opinion, which was, that the widow went away of her free will; and that if there was any foul play, it was in Meta's case, and must be looked up outside of Willhampton.

Yet there was the mystery, none were satisfied. The old sexton, who was supposed to know more of ghosts and transformations than any other living man, advanced a theory of his own: that the widow Morehouse was Meta in disguise, and that she would change into something else some time. Improbable as it seemed—yet stranger than that is sometimes truth—it was believed by some, while the incredulous, seeing no possible solution of the mystery, gradually dismissed the subject from their minds.

The little red cottage was locked up, and left to await the return of its owner.

All this while Meta was with her new friends, the banker and his wife. That first night had been passed in such refreshing slumber; and when the morning came, the banker and his wife would not let her go. They persuaded her to remain with them at least a week, yet she felt all the time she was doing them a great injury.

When the week went by, she had been so much happier than she had ever dared to hope, that when Mrs. Matthews told her that she must yet stay a little longer, she said:

"You are so good to me, that I dread to go away. Where else shall I find such dear friends?"

"You must not look for them, dear Meta. Stay with us always."

And Meta again yielded to the tempting happiness.

She grew almost cheerful under the influence of the childless old people's love. Not that she forgot, or ever could forget, the blasting whisper of Doctor James Martin, but she put it away for the time, and gave herself up to the happiness thrust upon her.

And she grew in loveliness. In all Willhampton there was no beauty like hers. Her golden hair was a crown fit for an empress. Her deep-blue eyes, of softest luster, lost their sadness as the time passed, and beamed with love for the dear friends she had found, and kindness for all. The bracing sea air brought the color of health to her cheek, rivaling the carnation with its soft, peachy bloom. Her form was perfect; tall, graceful, even queenly in its proportions; and she moved with an ease and unaffected freedom which was the envy of half her sex. Who would guess that this regally beautiful woman was once turned into the streets?

She was the light, the life, the joy of the old mansion. Her ringing laugh, echoing through the lofty rooms, made sweetest music; and her bright face was like sunshine after the storm.

The old banker almost worshiped her. He had waited and hoped so long for a pet of his own, and now one had been given him. He would have spoiled her by his indulgence, but for her own good sense. His wife was none the less infatuated; but, while she loved the beautiful waif, she watched her with a mother's care, that no more ill should come to her. She had received her in all thankfulness, and must render a strict account of her stewardship.

When George Matthews—the banker's nephew, who had lived with his uncle since boyhood—returned to Willhampton, he was all unprepared for the surprise that awaited him. The glory of Meta's wondrous beauty burst upon his vision like the radiance of the noonday sun, dazzling at first with its splendor; but as the eye becomes accustomed to the brilliancy, and finds pleasure in it, so did George Matthews's soul drink in the pleasure—the joy of the resplendent vision.

"For Heaven's sake, uncle, who is that 'Thalia' that I see walking in the park?" he exclaimed.

"That is Meta," said the banker, with a fond smile. "I haven't told you about her. But she is coming this way."

Meta, wholly unconscious of the admiring looks that were watching her every motion, approached very near before she saw them. She flushed a little when she saw the stranger.

"We have been waiting for you to come up," said the banker. "This is my nephew, George Matthews."

George Matthews was an accomplished man of the world—a cynic, mayhap, looking upon all women as so many seekers after husbands, as something to be admired for their beauty—to be tolerated for custom's sake; but as he bowed before this Meta, he felt that fulsome flattery would be out of place with her. He simply said:

"I am happy to meet you, Miss—"

The hot blood mounted to Meta's face at his hesitation, and a flash of pain, but she promptly gave him the cue.

"Meta, is my name," said she, wrapping herself about with an impenetrable shield of dignity.

"You shall take mine," said the banker, quickly. "I have been quite thoughtless. But, Meta, what's in a name?" he added, playfully.

"Much in the possession," she replied, pale with inward anguish.

Then she passed them, and went to her room to sob out the withering pain at her heart.

The advent of George Matthews made an entire change in Meta's life. The cynic had found one object that was above contempt, and he applied himself diligently to the following of this new aim—to the winning of Meta's love.

Meta could not remain ignorant of his admiration, nor wholly ignore his attentions, but she strove to discourage him without seeming to do so. Had she cared for him it would have been even worse; for there was that hideous secret, shutting her out from all love, suspended over her, a never-ceasing terror, following her wherever she went, a sleuth-hound of revenge.

George Matthews, in his love-blindness and excessive egotism, closed his heart against her mute appeals, and spared her not. And the banker and his wife marked the growing pallor of their pet, but never guessed the cause of her unhappiness.

"I must not stay here!" she murmured, as she sat in the darkness of her own room, thinking of the past—that past closed to all but herself. "Oh, that a veil of tenfold thickness might forever shut it out from my sight," she moaned.

"I must go! Out into the streets again—homeless, nameless, friendless."

How the words rung in her ears, buzzing, hissing, through her brain, until it seemed like molten lava.

"Driven away by love, followed by my misery, haunted by his revenge; yes, I must go!"

The teeth set hard against each other; the hand clenched fiercely the chair she sat in; the brow grew seamed and rigid; and the eyes looked the torture she was enduring.

Hastily gathering a little bundle of clothing, she donned her hat and stepped softly into the passage. How the very boards creaked with her light weight; and the rustling of the carpet seemed bidding her to go back. Back? To the wretchedness? She kept on, and when she was out in the cool darkness she felt better.

Out through the leafy shades, and along the walk to the gate. Hark! was that a step? Perhaps the echo of her own soft footfall on the velvet green-sward.

"Where now, Meta?"

"George Matthews!"

Yes, he was in the path before her; and she felt his penetrating gaze, though she could see nothing but the dim outline of his form.

"Where can you be going, Meta?"

With a little wail of despair, such as he never expected to hear from her, she fled back to the house—back to her misery.

Yet she thanked him, for she saw how wicked her thoughts had been.

"Saved from the streets again! Rescued from—oh, I dare not think it! Fly where I might, this torture would haunt me! Why not brave it here? I will gird myself with a mantle of fortitude, and defy my fate!"

After that she met George Matthews with the same chilling reserve, but she could no more withstand his searching looks. She had lost power. She had given him a hold upon her that he never would release. Might it not ultimately cause his triumph?

CHAPTER IV.

ARRANCOURT'S FATE.

SLOWLY, silently, stealthily, the bent figure of a man crept up the long carriage-way leading to Arrancourt mansion. Ever and anon he stopped, and gave a low, peculiar whistle, muttering curses when the signal was not answered. Then he crept on again. In this way he approached the mansion until he stood almost within the doorway. He chirped again.

This time he was answered by the opening of the door. Crouching back into the shelter of the shrubbery, he feasted his eyes upon the dark beauty of the woman that came out, holding the light before her, and peering into the gloom. She softly spoke a name, and the man stepped from his concealment.

"Oh, you are here!" said the woman, with the least perceptible sneer. "I feared you would not come."

"You have kept me waiting, Dora," said the man, not removing his eyes from her face. "Is every thing ready?"

"Ready and waiting. She is in the north chamber. No noise. Quick and sure, and no traces left. No blood!"

Dora Martin spoke in a steady, hissing whisper that made her listener shudder, yet it gave him but half an idea of the pitiless passions that were surging through her frame.

"Good God, Dora! Can not this be avoided?" he exclaimed.

"Do you shrink from the task, Allan Wentworth?" she asked, with withering scorn, while her coal-black eyes darted scintillations of consuming hatred. Ah! there was the imp that Doctor James Martin saw so plainly, while looking at her across that table in his room on Sixth street.

"Let me pass!" said the man, in a voice quivering with desperation. "I would dare any thing for you, Dora Martin."

With a smile of triumph, she opened the door softly, and Allan Wentworth disappeared within the great hall.

The elegant mansion of Arrancourt overlooked a beautiful sheet of water of the same name.

Years ago Norman Vinton was in trade in a southern city, and even before reaching middle age, he purchased the beautiful site, and erected the princely mansion for a country seat. But ill health overtook him before he had an opportunity to occupy this rural retreat. With his family, he started for foreign lands, leaving Arrancourt to the care of Moses Martin until such time as he should return.

Moses Martin had just buried his loved wife, and tired of the world, Arrancourt offered a quiet retreat. So, with his two motherless girls, Dora and Ella, he went to the delightful country seat.

The years passed, and Norman Vinton did not return. Then came the news of his death.

Meanwhile, Dora and Ella grew in stature and beauty. Their father had a handsome property aside from his savings at Arrancourt, and he gave them every advantage. They were sent abroad to school, and it was on their return that Dora paid her uncle James a visit. As we have seen, her stay was very short.

The news that she took back to Arrancourt surprised her father. He knew absolutely nothing of Norman Vinton, having secured his situation through the agency of others, and meeting his employer but twice. Now, that he was really alive, and coming home, he could not say whether he was pleased or not. He set about renovating the long-disused rooms, ably seconded by Dora, who could hardly await the arrival. She was maturing her plans to become the mistress of Arrancourt. The Satan which Doctor James saw behind her lustrous eyes was nothing more or less than an all absorbing ambition to reach the high position to which she felt entitled, by reason of her beauty and accomplishments. Selfish, unscrupulous, and strong-willed, she would brook no restraint, nor hesitate in the way she had chosen. Withal, she had consummate tact, and concealed her real nature beneath a garb of modesty.

Ella was not less impatient than her sister for the arrival of the Vintons, but her impatience was the result of different motives. Her volatile spirits needed a suitable outlet. The somber life at Arrancourt was not to her taste, and she hoped that the advent of the Vintons would bring the innocent gaiety and harmless amusements she loved so well.

But she was disappointed. Norman Vinton proved to be more of a recluse than her father. He was a tall, dark-haired man, somewhat stooping, cold and formal in manner, and reticent. Yet Moses Martin was quite pleased with him; for he never interfered in the management of the estate. If he never gave praise, so he never blamed; and the old manager went on in the beaten track he had trod for years.

Henry Vinton was the opposite of his father, and there seemed no bond of sympathy between them. Generous and frank, the young man's sunny disposition had not been soured by contact with the world; and he took to Arrancourt a heart untrammelled, and a mind unsullied by the follies and vices of city life.

He was charmed with the sisters, Dora's brilliancy fascinated him, and Ella's simplicity pleased him. Without expressing any preferences for either, he played at courtship with them, thus whiling away the hours which otherwise might have seemed tedious in that lonely house.

And he hardly knew himself which he preferred. If he loved either, the feeling had stolen upon him so quietly that he knew nothing of it.

But Dora's keen eye read his mind better than he knew it himself. She saw that Ella's gentle, trusting ways were surely winning him from her. Alas, for the lovely Ella! The hate of a baffled woman was pursuing her, and would hunt her to the death.

Allan Wentworth crept along the upper hall, but he missed the door. Ah! Dora Martin's hireling was a bungler. Ella slept peacefully, while the assassin entered Norman Vinton's room. He stole toward the corner where the master of Arrancourt had thrown himself upon the bed, with the intention of taking a short nap before retiring for the night. He halted to prepare himself for the stroke. With a little steel hammer in one hand, and a dark-lantern in the other, he stood at the bedside, listening to the deep, regular breathing of the sleeper. Who can tell what thoughts passed through his mind?

He moved the slide to the lantern, but when the light fell upon the bearded face of the sleeper, he started back with an oath, overturning a chair in his haste.

Norman Vinton awoke, and sprung from the bed to grapple with his unseen foe; but ere they met, the room was flooded with light, and in the doorway stood a SHADOWY TERROR, with long, golden hair hanging loosely about the ghastly face, and a long white robe falling in filmy indistinctness to the floor; while on the breast gleamed an eye of flame, dazzling in its brightness. With outstretched hand the apparition pointed at Norman Vinton, then vanished as silently as it came.

For one brief moment the two men, left in the darkness, stared where they had last seen each other; then Allan Wentworth rushed out of the room, while Norman Vinton, quaking with terror, sunk in a chair and screamed wildly for mercy. His screams reached Dora, who, seizing a light, hastened to his room.

"Back! back!" he shouted, shutting out the light from Dora's candle with his hands. "Take her away! I didn't do it! They lied to you! Keep off—keep off!"

Dora took a step into the room, and Vinton, with a screech of terror, sprung for the window. Dora comprehended his design, and, quick as he, grasped his coat and snatched him back from certain death. He fell to the floor, a grinning madman, writhing and gnashing his teeth, and foaming at the mouth.

Dora recoiled in affright, and Norman Vinton, with

a lightning bound, alighted on his feet and darted through the door, filling the house with the most appalling cries for help. Henry Vinton and Mr. Martin, who had just appeared upon the scene, gave chase.

Yet Ella slept.

With a madness almost equal to Norman Vinton's, Dora raved at the failure of her plans.

"Oh, this hateful night's work!" she muttered. "The blundering fool! And that milk-faced chit yet lives to cheat me of my right and my love! Oh, this love! It is consuming me! Did I ever believe that any man could, by his very look, so control my whole being as to make me what I am to-night? But I can not help it! And the thought of her spurs me on. She must die! She shall!"

Was she not the maddest of the mad? Could the mightiest love, the bitterest hate, or the most absorbing ambition, so transform a beautiful woman into a horrid, soulless demon? Say rather that she was crazed.

With cat-like tread, she glided across the hall to her sister's door. Softly she entered, and without a tremor—without a thought of pity, or mercy, or love, save the consuming passion for Henry Vinton, she advanced to the bedside.

Yet Ella slept.

The moon, now risen, threw its silver sheen upon the bed, revealing the lovely sleeper's face, and one white round arm thrown over her head. There was a smile upon her lips, and she whispered the name: "Henry."

The grating teeth of the pitiless fiend bending over her, told that her listening ears had caught the sound.

"You'll never say that word again," she hissed.

And baring the gently swelling bosom, she raised the merciless arm.

How like a fiend she looked! How the demoniacal passions had overwhelmed her beauty, and left her a grinning, writhing, hideous thing of hate and devilishness!

But she was not destined to stain her soul with that horrible crime. As that flood of light had filled Norman Vinton's room, so did it flash into Ella Martin's, saving her from death, and surprising Dora in her murderous attitude; and with it, as if a concomitant of this effulgence, appeared the apparition.

With a cry of baffled rage, Dora turned upon the phantom. Heaven or hell had no terrors for her then. The prince of darkness, or a legion of angels, would not have daunted her. Reason was drowned in the whirlpool of relentless hate, and heedless of every thing, she flew toward the phantom.

Again she was doomed to disappointment. The light and the specter vanished, and she struck only empty air. While rushing wildly here and there, yet thrusting with that murderous knife that she might forever silence this witness to her intended crime, the hateful light again burst upon her vision; and casting her eyes upward, she saw, suspended, as if it were, in mid-air, the shadowy terror, with its eye of flaming, dazzling fire.

Sickening with horror, Dora gazed upon the awful sight, and realized that she had no mortal to deal with. She fell upon her knees and begged for mercy.

In answer to her entreaties came a mocking laugh; and that eye of fire flashed and grew, reaching out its arms of crimson flame, nearer—nearer—nearer—until it seemed that the devouring element must lick up her garments, and envelop her with its seething heat. Fraught with such terror as she never knew before, she fled wildly to her room, and fastened the door with bolt and lock. Yet that mocking laugh reached her through the oaken panels, and, springing upon the bed, she buried her head in the pillows to shut out the awful sound. Even footsteps in the hall affrighted her; yet it was only Henry Vinton returning with his father, now sane, but silent, and as weak as though recovering from a long illness. Then the very stillness was frightful, and the darkness was peopled with fearful fancies. Ah! what would she not have given to have blotted that night's work out of existence?

Still Ella slept the sleep of health and innocence, and dreamed the dream of love.

CHAPTER V.

THE MISSION OF DUTY.

FLOCKS of snow-white foam danced about the prow, and eddied in the wake of a noble vessel, as she steamed gallantly through the Narrows.

On the upper deck, apart from the eager, expectant crowd, stood Paul Rodney, his heart overflowing with thankfulness at once more beholding the shores of his native land, gazing with pleasure and pride at familiar and half-forgotten objects.

Over on the Long Island shore was Fort Hamilton, well remembered; and isolated in waves was the old, round, red Fort Lafayette, as familiar to him as his own name. So was Coney Island, which came in sight as he passed from under the guns of the harbor defenders. But he turned from all these as the steamer passed the westerly point of Governor's Island, and brought the grandeur of the empire city into full view.

Eight years previously he had sailed, a mere strippling from the same port. He returned a well-made, strong-sinewed man. Hardships and exposure had bronzed his once fair complexion almost to swarthy-ness. He had a full, gray eye, mild in repose, yet gleaming with inward force; his nose was prominent, yet well-formed; and his finely-cut lips could whisper gently like the fond mother, shout the battle-cry, or hurl defiance to a merciless foe. His long hair, unshorn for many a month, was a dark, glossy brown, and his beard of the same hue, was soft and flowing. Add to all these attractions, a figure almost gigantic

in proportions, and majestic in bearing, and you have the description of a man who always drew a second look from all who saw him.

Cast adrift to battle with life alone at a very early age, he had yet acquired a fair amount of book-knowledge, and his somewhat adventurous life had given him much valuable experience, and a noble self-reliance that became him well.

He was one of the first to seek a fortune in the land of gold. Seven years of patient and untiring industry made him the possessor of a few thousands, and tired of the almost barbarous life of the miner, he turned his face once more toward his native city. But there was one regret; he left behind the companion of his toils, Walter Morehouse, the dearest friend on earth.

"If I should not live to see mother again," said Walter, the night before Paul left the camp, "you will watch over her, Paul? She has a comfortable home and some money. I will send some more by you, and you will tell her that in another year I shall be with her, if I am spared."

Paul promised, and sewing Walter's money in his belt, separate from his own, he bade him good-by.

To save his means, Paul took passage in a sailing-vessel, but the ship was wrecked. He, with many others, was picked up and taken to a South American port. There he waited in vain for some homeward-bound vessel, and at last took passage to England, and from thence to New York, arriving safely after a year of beating about. But his hard-earned store of gold was gone, while Walter's was yet intact.

Nothing but absolute starvation would have tempted him to appropriate to his own use a penny of that money intrusted to his care.

As the steamer swung to her moorings, Paul Rodney sprung ashore, filled with delight, as once more standing in his native city. He took a step toward the busy street, but a hand was laid upon his arm, and a voice spoke his name.

"Robert Ransom!" exclaimed Paul, surprised, yet evincing a coldness that indicated no great pleasure at meeting this man. "When did you return from the mines?"

"More than three months ago," replied the man.

"But where have you been?" A shadow fell upon Paul's face while answering the question, but he threw off his gloom ere he had finished.

"How were the boys when you left?"

"We left none but Walter," said the man.

"How was he? Doing well, I trust? I hoped to meet him here."

"We left him in his coffin," said Ransom.

"Good heavens! that cannot be?"

"Died in less than a month after you left, Paul. I helped to put him in the ground," added the man, in a tone that grated harshly on Paul's ears. "You haven't seen his mother yet?"

"Not yet."

"Are you going?"

The question aroused Paul from his abstraction. He drew back, and his hands worked nervously as though he could hardly restrain himself from punishing the scamp without delay.

"Going, you villain?" he exclaimed. "But I'll overlook it, Bob Ransom. Yes, I am going to Will-hampton to-day, and if you have any word from Walter, or any money belonging to Mrs. Morehouse, you had better send it along."

"Who told you I had," cried the man, with an air of bravado, yet unable to meet Paul's honest gaze. "I will see you again," said Paul, turning away.

"Wait!" cried the man, in alarm. "You mustn't be too hard on a feller. Walter gave me a letter for you. It's up to the house."

"Lead the way," said Paul, sternly. "I have no time to waste with you."

Ransom's boarding-house was but a short distance from the wharf, and they set out toward it, Paul's rapid strides showing his impatience to have done with the villain.

Paul almost snatched the soiled envelope from Ransom's hand, and tore it open with eager haste. A bank check dropped to the floor.

Ransom sprung to pick it up, and Paul allowed him to do it.

"Fool!" muttered the disappointed villain. "If I had known this!"

Paul finished the reading of the letter, drawing his hand often across his eyes. Then he held out his hand for the check, which the man reluctantly gave him.

"Now, Robert Ransom, said Paul, sternly, "where is the money that Walter sent home by you?"

"He never sent any!" said Ransom, yet showing evidence of guilt.

"He did!" shouted Paul, grasping him by the collar. "Where is it? Tell me, or I'll thrash it out of you."

Ransom knew that he was abundantly able to make good his threat, and he whined:

"Don't, Paul! I was hard up, and I've used some of it. Here is the rest."

Paul released his hold and took the money.

"That is all I want of you, Bob Ransom; only for your own good, I would advise you to keep out of my way."

The villain scowled wickedly, and, when Paul was out of hearing, muttered:

"You think you have done with me, but I'll show you the difference before you are a day older. The woman, Morehouse, never shall have that money, if a sure hand and a sharp knife are of any account."

Paul Rodney found some difficulty in getting the check cashed, but succeeded at last, and placed the money in his pocket, murmuring:

"Poor Walter, he gave it to me, but his mother must have it all."

He now bent his steps toward the depot, and inquired the price of a ticket to Willhampton. The answer made him aware of the leanness of his pocket-book.

"I must take it afoot," he said to himself, yet half aloud.

And at his elbow stood a man who smiled grimly as he heard the words, and gave the wink to another man hid away in the crowd.

Paul now purchased some cheese and crackers for a lunch on the way, and then set out for Willhampton.

Behind him skulked the two men, never losing sight of him, and one of them was Bob Ransom.

Paul stepped along quite gayly, and when he had left the city behind, and breathed the fresh air of the country, his spirits revived still more.

He pictured to himself the cosy little home of Warren's mother, and a mild-faced woman in black, mourning for the lost one. How much good the money would do her, now that she had no one to lean upon! And if he did sometimes wish that he had as much, it was with no idea of depriving her of it. He would have starved rather than that.

He trudged along courageously till dark, stopping occasionally for a drink of water and a bite of lunch. As the gloom of approaching night deepened, he thought himself of a place to sleep. At the time he was passing through some thick woods, and as the night was warm and pleasant, he resolved to try a bed under the trees. He had slept in many a worse place. Selecting a suitable spot but a few steps from the road, he scraped some leaves together, and throwing himself upon them, was soon fast asleep.

All the while the two men had been on his track. As it grew dark they drew nearer, and when Paul sunk to rest, they were not far behind. They saw him turn from the road, and surmised his object.

"We must wait until he gets asleep," said Ransom, "for he is a perfect tiger when he gets started, and you and me would stand no sight at all. He'd handle us like two kittens. But if we take him when he's asleep, we can creep up and give him a prick in the heart that will settle him at once. Then we can gobble the money, and slip back to town as fast as we are a mind to. And who'll be the wiser?"

This very simple arrangement was readily agreed to by Ransom's accomplice, and the two sat down and waited until they felt sure that their victim was asleep. Then they skulked softly toward the wood. Paul's regular breathing soon guided them to the spot where he was so quietly sleeping.

They crept up one on each side, and each with a keen knife uplifted.

"Now!" whispered Ransom, through his hard-set teeth, and simultaneously the two weapons descended on their murderous errand.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SHADOWY TERROR.

THE night of horror left its impress upon the inmates of Arrancourt.

The sickly, cadaverous expression which came over Norman Vinton's face when he first saw the phantom never left it. The sight alone could not make so deep an impression. There was something connected with it that was a constantly-recurring terror by day and by night. He grew nervous and fitful, starting at every sound, and wildly listening to even the rustling of a leaf, as though every moment fearing another visit from the shadowy terror. His face was seamed with care, his body feeble and bent, and his eyes were wild and staring. The canker of remorse was gnawing at his vitals.

He spent the greater part of his time in the library, refusing all companionship except Dora, and she seemed essential to his existence. He was peevish and fretful when she was absent, and begged that she would not leave him alone; and with a disregard of self that was wholly foreign to her nature, she strove to gratify his whims.

Henry Vinton was also changed. A troubled gravity had become the habitual expression of his face, and he moved about the old house with a slow and solemn step, like one in the presence of the dead.

He was with Ella more than ever, now that Dora gave so much of her time to his father. Although the fair girl was cognizant of the gloom that enveloped Arrancourt, she yet could not restrain all her cheerfulness, and her society proved a partial antidote to Henry Vinton's wretchedness.

Henry had not yet learned the secret of that night of terror. That something extraordinary had occurred to place his father in that state of mental excitement in which he found him, he was well satisfied, but he was far from guessing the truth.

He had hoped that his father would make him his confidant, but, on the contrary, he realized that a barrier was forming between them that precluded the possibility. He sought to glean something from Ella, but, as we have seen, she knew even less than he, and Moses Martin was as much in the dark. So there were but two that could enlighten him.

One day he found Dora in the conservatory. It was a fitting time to clear up the mystery, lift the gloom which oppressed him, and relieve the suspense which bore so heavily upon him.

She was culling flowers, and deftly arranging them into a bouquet for Norman Vinton. She did not see Henry, and he stood for a moment admiring her rare loveliness; yet there came over him, for the first time, a feeling of dread and fear of the dark, handsome face.

When he revealed himself, she was startled, and turned very pale.

"How you frightened me Mr. Vinton. I did not know that any one was near."

"I have been here some time," said he, gravely. "I wish you would give me your attention for a moment."

She cast a quick, searching glance into his face, but saw only a look of sadness. Although she had neglected him of late, she yet hoped when he spoke.

"I must soon return to your father," said she, winding the thread about the flower stems.

"It is of my father that I wish to speak," said he.

"Then I care nothing for what you have to say," thought Dora, with a shade of disappointment on her face, but Henry went on.

"You have usurped a place near my father, excluding every one else," said he, bitterly.

"Mr. Vinton," began Dora, haughtily, but her tone softening as she proceeded, "it is not of my seeking. You are not aware, perhaps, of your father's true condition. His mind is fearfully shattered, and only by the utmost care can he be saved from hopeless insanity. To thwart him only aggravates the malady, and for his sake and—yours—"

She dropped her eyes so modestly, and blushed so charmingly, that Henry almost forgot what she was saying.

"For mine?" he exclaimed. "And why?"

The answer she gave was a look of absorbing love, that he could not mistake.

Thoughts surged with lightning speed through Henry Vinton's brain, as this new light burst upon him, and unconsciously he put his arm about her waist, and drew her unresisting form to his. He forgot the errand for which he had come, and the whispered vow of constancy to Ella, which was hardly cold upon his lips, and gave himself up to the blissful intoxication of the moment.

"Do you love me, Dora?" he whispered, bewitched by the nearness of her perfect form, and the devouring look of love in her lustrous eyes.

"More than words can tell," she faintly articulated.

At this moment the door opened, and Ella tripped lightly in, not knowing that any one was there. When she saw the lovers she stopped, and her face became rigid and white as marble. For a moment she gazed, stupefied; then, with a wail of mortal anguish, she fled from the conservatory.

Henry Vinton forgot the form that reclined against him, and the eyes that looked so lovingly into his. He stared blankly into space, filled with remorse for his perfidy, and dumb with bitterest grief.

"Let me go now, Henry," said Dora, to break the spell of his misery. "I will come again soon."

He passively allowed her to disengage herself from his arms, remaining in the same position until the door closed upon her. Then his anguish burst forth:

"Oh, what have I done! what have I done!" he exclaimed, clasping his hands in an attitude of despair and frantically pacing to and fro. "Oh Ella! my darling! Can you ever forgive me the wrong? Can you ever trust me again? Can you overlook this perfidy, and not hate me as I deserve? Ah, I fear not!"

He sunk into a seat and buried his face in his hands. He had no knowledge of the lapse of time. The shades of evening gathered around him, but he stirred not. All at once he heard the rustling of a dress, and with a thrill of joy he looked up, for he knew it was Ella.

She did not see him, and he caught her hand.

"Oh, Ella, forgive me!" he pleaded. "I knew not what I was doing! I love you, and you only! Say that you have not lost faith in me!"

She listened almost calmly to his words; then drew her hand away and pointed to Dora, who was approaching them smiling and radiant.

"Come Henry," said Dora, "I have been looking for you."

He looked at Ella, but she had turned coldly away. She had not forgiven him. Dora smilingly awaited him, conscious of her power, and he gave her his arm, escorting her into the house.

"Mercy! mercy! mercy! Spare my life!"

The pitiful pleadings came to their ears as they traversed the broad entrance-hall, and following them were the most heart-rending shrieks that mortal ever heard.

"Your father!" gasped Dora; and together they sped up the stairs. At the landing they stopped, transfixed with affright. Right before them stood the shadowy terror of Arrancourt, and the flaming spot of fire upon the breast dazzled their eyes like the midday sun. Suddenly the strange vision vanished, and out of the darkness came the whispered words:

"Beware! Beware!"

Dora clutched her companion's arm.

"What is it, Henry? What can it be?"

"A voice from the other world, perhaps, and we must heed its warning."

As he spoke, a fleeting figure passed them, the wind from her flying garments fanning their faces.

"You have killed me, sister," was whispered so distinctly that Henry heard it as well as Dora.

"Ella! Ella!" cried the frantic Henry, darting after her. "Wait for me! Oh, do wait! I can not let you go!"

But in the darkness he lost sight of her.

Dora stood gazing down the stairs, a fiendish smile disfiguring her face.

"She will save me the trouble," she hissed through her clinched teeth. "And there's not so much difference between self-destruction and murder. Ah, Henry Vinton, if you find your love again, she will be cold in death. The way is open for me; and I shall yet be mistress of Arrancourt."

She now hastened to the library, and Norman Vinton lay in a dead swoon.

The shadowy terror had paid him another visit.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE WOMAN'S HEART.

MOSES MARTIN was startled by the unexpected appearance of Henry Vinton.

"Ella!" he gasped. "She has gone!"

"What!" cried the father, jumping to his feet.

Henry told him in a few words all that he knew, not sparing his own perfidy.

"Arrancourt is accursed!" moaned the sorrow-stricken father. "There's nothing but misery here!"

Then he calmed himself, and calling the negroes, ordered them to search the grounds, while he and Henry sprung into the saddle, and spurred their horses toward the lake.

Dora stood at the window looking out at the smoking torches moving here and there, held by the negroes looking like so many demons just from Hades.

"They have not found her," she muttered, as she saw the lights all coming toward the mansion, and heard her father's voice ordering out every horse on the place. "And they will not find her, alive. But I must go down and simulate grief. Bah! how can I, when my whole being is alive with joy? Grief? ha! ha!"

She found a sorrowful scene in the great kitchen. The old negroes, every one of whom almost worshiped Ella, were bewailing her loss in the extravagant style peculiar to them. Some were sobbing and wringing their hands, some shouting, some screaming, and all moving hither and thither, making a horrible din; while near the door stood her father and Henry, stern and silent, waiting for the horses.

She made her way to her father's side.

"You have not found her?" said she, in a subdued voice.

"Not yet," replied Mr. Martin, taking her hand. "You must go back with the master, my child. We will do every thing that can be done, and I think we shall soon bring her home."

"Oh, father! I fear that you may never find dear sister again!" sobbed Dora, bursting into a flood of tears, that effectually removed every unpleasant impression from Henry's mind.

"Do not despair, Dora," said he, going over to her side. "We shall soon have her safe back."

"God grant that you may!" said Dora, looking up to him through the glistening tears; "but something tells me, Henry, that I shall never see her again!"

And Henry, again under the spell of her magical charms, pressed his lips to hers in one, long, lingering kiss.

With a face all aglow with triumph, Dora flew back to the library and stationed herself at the window.

"Oh, if they should find her now," she whispered, trembling at the thought. "They must not! They shall not!"

She hastened to her sister's room, and eagerly tore a strip from the shawl which Ella had worn.

"I'll find her now," she said, smiling wickedly.

She went out to the kennels.

"Prince! Prince! Here, Prince!" she called, and a great bloodhound, savage and grim, came bounding toward her, and licked her hand.

"Good fellow! Do you you want a chase? I know you do. Scent this."

She held the piece of her sister's garment to his nose, and with a low whine he started for the gate.

"Eager, are you?" said Dora. "So am I, old fellow. Let me open the gate."

She swung open the wicket, and away bounded the sleuth-hound, with his nose scenting the ground.

He circled round the mansion, moving this way and that, at first puzzled; but at length he started off on a straight line through the park.

"Go!" hissed Dora. "Hunt her to the death! Tear her in pieces, that she may never cross my path again! Ha! ha! Prince will find her, and he knows no mercy—find her, Henry Vinton, long before your fleetest horses can come up with her. And what a sight it will be for you!"

She waited until the deep baying of the hound was no longer audible. Then she went back into the house to watch and wait for the sleuth-hound's return, and exult over her triumph.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FRIEND INDEED.

THE assassins were too eager to make quick work with Paul Rodney. They missed their mark entirely. Their knives clashed together as they went down, throwing them both aside, and waking Paul. He jumped to his feet, and dealt blows right and left.

But the robbers were not disposed to relinquish their prey. They saw that Paul had no weapons, and taking courage, they rushed upon him with their knives, pressing him hard. He fought desperately, and might have conquered eventually; but a fourth person appeared unexpectedly, and the click of his pistol sent the robbers off in a hurry.

"Upon my soul, you stood them a good fight," said Charles Matthews. "Are you hurt?"

"Not in the least, thanks to you," said Paul. "I owe you my life."

"I am not sure of that," said the banker, with a smile. "You would have whipped the curs, but not without some ugly cuts, perhaps; so I will take all the credit that is my due. My name is Charles Matthews."

"Mine is Paul Rodney. I was on my way to Willhampton, and these rascals fell upon me while I was asleep."

"Willhampton is my home, Mr. Rodney. I have a carriage in the road, and why not make the rest of your journey with me?"

"With pleasure," said Paul, frankly.

"How far to Willhampton?" asked Paul, after they were seated in the carriage.

"But a few miles now. We shall be there in two hours or less."

"So near! I should have kept on."

"Then you really intended to make a night of it?" asked the banker, with an amused smile.

"I certainly should, Mr. Matthews, if I had not been disturbed."

"If I had been in your situation," said the banker, laughingly, "I should thank the prowling thieves for waking me, though I can not say that I particularly admire the mode."

Paul laughed good-humoredly.

"I assure you, Mr. Matthews, that I never slept better. I have passed many a night in worse places."

"You must have seen something of the rough side of life, Mr. Rodney."

"More than I hope to again," said Paul, earnestly.

"If not painful to you, I shall be pleased to listen to an account of some of your adventures," said Mr. Matthews, quite charmed with the young man's manner.

Paul readily complied, giving a cursory sketch of his life, and taking no credit for acts of real heroism.

Mr. Matthews was interested.

"Thank you, Mr. Rodney. I have derived much pleasure. Your errand here reminds me that I have a story."

Thereupon the banker related the facts of Mrs. Morehouse's strange disappearance, and of the finding of Meta. Paul listened in wonder.

"There is an air of romance about this Meta that pleases me," said Paul.

"You are not alone, Mr. Rodney; and I predict more interest yet when you see her."

"Is she very beautiful?"

"Beyond compare," replied the banker, enthusiastically. "She is my pride and my pet. I never before saw a woman in whom were combined such beauty and grace. And she is accomplished as well."

"You interest me more and more," said Paul, "but I must not lose sight of my duty. Has nothing been heard of the widow Morehouse?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Then my search is but just commenced," said Paul, wearily.

"On the contrary, I think it is ended for the present," said the banker. "It will be useless to attempt to find Mrs. Morehouse. There is a detective working at the case, but he has not yet determined, to a certainty, whether the lady was carried away, or went of her own free will. If he, a man bred to the business, is puzzled, what can you hope?"

"Very true," said Paul, thoughtfully; "yet I feel that something ought to be done. Advise me, Mr. Matthews, for I need it."

"The proper course, as it seems to me," said Mr. Matthews, "is to place the money where it will draw interest, find some employment for yourself, and wait at least until the detective gives up the case or finds the lady. What think you?"

"I rely upon your judgment," replied Paul; "and I can see no better way to act."

"I am in the banking business," continued Mr. Matthews, "and I will take the money if you wish. I have already a small balance in Mrs. Morehouse's favor. And I will give you employment, Mr. Rodney. I shall have a vacancy at the bank next week."

"But I have no references, Mr. Matthews," said Paul, much surprised.

"I ask none but those you have already given me, Mr. Rodney. I feel sure that I shall not find my confidence misplaced."

"Thank you, Mr. Matthews," said Paul, with considerable feeling. "It has troubled me more than a little to know what I should find to do."

"Then we will consider that matter settled, Mr. Rodney. You will make my house your home while you are with me, which I hope will be a long time."

"I shall strive to do my duty in whatever capacity I am placed," said Paul.

"I feel sure of it, Mr. Rodney. Here we are at home."

CHAPTER IX.

A SCOWL-SHADOW.

THE banker was not expected home until late in the night, and George volunteered to wait up for him. He looked inquiringly at the tall, sailor-like figure of Paul Rodney, and the banker, seeing the look, introduced him at once, adding:

"He takes Goldthwaite's place."

The greeting was not cordial, although Paul strove to make it so; and when the banker requested George to show Paul to his room, he complied with a very bad grace.

"You have decided to try life upon the land?" said George, glancing at Paul's coarse garb. "Have you followed the sea for any considerable time?"

Paul saw the covert sneer, but he chose to ignore it.

"I have crossed it twice."

"Neither sailor nor landsman, then?"

"Both, or neither," replied Paul, good-humoredly. "I have led a roving life so far, but Mr. Matthews offered me a situation, and I accepted."

"I should think that you would feel almost afraid to try it. My uncle is very exacting."

"He is also just, I hope."

"Yes," replied George, feeling the rebuke, but loth to admit it; "Goldthwaite hardly suited him; I hope you will succeed better."

"Thank you," said Paul. "I hope I shall succeed."

And this was the commencement of George's enmity toward Paul Rodney. He hardly knew why he had conceived the dislike. There was no tangible reason for it. It was simply a presentiment that this tall stranger would, in some way, prove inimical to his interests.

In the morning Paul met the banker's wife for the first time. She was yet a beautiful woman, and the young man felt that reverence for her, which a life of compulsory exclusion from the society of woman always begets. With a gallantry and sincerity which could give no offense, he bent down from his great height, and kissed her brow.

"I never knew a mother," said he, sadly.

The good woman never forgot this simple act. She never knew a son, and this great, noble-looking man seemed more like one than any person she had ever met.

Meta now entered the dining-room, and Paul took in her queenly beauty at a glance. He bowed before her with a native grace seldom equaled by the most polished courtier, George looking on the while, with lowering brows, for he knew then why he disliked Paul Rodney.

Without being aware of it himself, Paul, was a skillful narrator, and he entertained his listeners very agreeably during breakfast. The banker was well satisfied, but George, although forced to acknowledge his merits, was more than ever disposed to look upon him as an intruder.

After the meal the banker very delicately pressed a sum of money upon Paul, which was frankly accepted; for he well knew that his present appearance was not in keeping with his changed prospects. He was busy nearly all day effecting the transformation, which, when finished, left him looking very little like the Paul Rodney that the banker found battling with the robbers.

As it wanted an hour or two to dinner time, Paul strolled down to the beach. Beneath the shade of jutting rocks he sat down, and while he watched the waves beating at his feet, he wondered if indeed his misfortunes were over. Then he thought of the pleasant people he had fallen among, and of the charming Meta. In all his life he had never thought seriously of love or marriage. Both seemed too far off—something like the end of life—to be troubling his mind; but that was all changed. In an instant it had become a question of the present. He had found some one to live for, and strive for; and he felt that a failure in this would be worse, tenfold, than any misfortune he had yet met.

Out in the bay was George Matthews, rowing toward the beach. Paul saw and recognized him, but he could not make out the two ladies in the boat with him. He kept his eye on them, yet busily thinking of his own affairs. He saw George push bravely into the surf, handling the oars with a skillful hand. Turning away for a moment, he did not witness the mishap, but when he looked again all three were struggling in the water.

He was on his feet in an instant, and hastening to the rescue.

When George felt the oars break in his hand, and knew that the boat must surely capsize, he turned his attention to the ladies. He bravely threw an arm around each, and by great exertion kept them afloat, but he could make no headway. One of the helpless beings must be left to drown. Which should it be? He looked into the patient face of his aunt Matthews, and his conscience said, *no—no*. He turned to the beautiful Meta, and his heart whispered *no*. Yet he felt that his strength was failing him—that he was slowly but surely giving up to exhaustion. Just then Paul Rodney's shaggy head appeared above the crest of a wave. With vigorous strokes, he soon reached the imperiled trio.

"You have done nobly, George," said he relieving him of Mrs. Matthews, and boldly striking out for shore. "Follow me if you can! At all events keep the lady's head above water. I will return soon."

As is often the case, there was not a boat within reach, and the people collected on the shore were passive spectators. Paul, however, was equal to the task. He needed no help. His Herculean strength, united with a perfect knowledge of the art of swimming, took him safely to the beach with his helpless burden. Scarcely feeling the exertion, he was ready to plunge in again.

George was struggling heroically, but he was too nearly exhausted to make any progress. Paul's welcome face again appeared, and soon he was on the return, with Meta in his care.

George, relieved of the dead weight, now kept up with Paul, and together they reached the land in safety.

Paul shook the sea-water from his hair, and, with a smile, took the other's outstretched hand.

"An unexpected bath, Mr. Matthews, but I really feel the better for it. How are the ladies?"

"As well as ever, thank you, Paul," said the banker's wife.

"Why, my dear madam, you were not one of them?" exclaimed Paul, surprised exceedingly. "I never even looked at your faces."

"I must say I like that," said Meta, who overheard his last remark. "Who ever heard of such a thing! It is too bad!"

And she held up her hands deprecatingly.

"I shall never be guilty of such negligence again," said Paul, with an earnest look, and a smile that seemed to light up his whole being.

"See that you do not, sir," said Meta, gayly. Then, in a more serious tone, she said:

"I thank you, Mr. Rodney, for my life."

"And I thank God that I was placed near to be of service to you," said Paul, fervently.

George stood but a few steps from them, silent and moody. The shadow of Paul's presence was already falling about him.

Paul guessed something of his thoughts, and felt pained that he had been the cause.

"Come, George," said he pleasantly, "the ladies are waiting to thank you for your bravery. Had it not been for your presence of mind, at the time of the mishap, I fear that we should not have been blessed with this happy termination."

"Yes, George," said his aunt; "we owe our safety equally to you and Mr. Rodney."

And Meta softened a little as she thanked him.

The carriage was waiting, and the party got in and were driven home.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOUND OF FATE.

FLEEING through the night-solitude, fleeing from a danger that she knew not of, fleeing from a wily foe that should have been a dear friend, fleeing from the misery of a broken heart, Ella Martin kept on.

There was but one settled purpose in view; to escape the sight of Henry's perfidy, and her sister's treachery. There was no anger in her heart for either; only a devouring, maddening grief that goaded her on, unmindful of results.

She scarcely thought of the wrong she was doing her father; but, as the soft night-air cooled her throbbing temples, she grew much calmer, and looked less excitedly upon the situation. She would have turned back then rather than bring sorrow upon her poor father, but she heard the deep baying of Dora's avenger tracking his prey.

"The bloodhound is on my track!" she whispered, with white lips. "He will tear me in pieces! Oh, they might have spared me this! It is Dora—it is my sister! God pity her—and me!"

She was paralyzed with horror for a moment. Then she ran wildly on to escape the horrible death.

Beyond, through the trees, she could see the silver surface of the lake, lighted by the rays of the moon which was well up in the heavens.

"There is safety," she thought. "There is happiness—there is rest—eternal rest, if I can but reach it!"

The hound's deep baying was growing more and more distinct, spurring her to renewed exertion.

"Oh, mercy, I shall not escape!" she cried; "he is almost here!"

Yet she kept on.

The water was right before her—a haven of rest. A few short moments and she would be safe.

"Oh, my God! I hear the footsteps in the leaves!" she wailed, in despair. "He will overtake me! Oh, what a death! Oh, Henry! Oh, Dora! Oh, father! don't you hear me call?"

The hound saw Ella, and raising his head from the ground, he gave a yelp of satisfaction, and bounded toward her.

She heard him, and with a short prayer for mercy, she made one more effort to reach the water. There was but a step to the verge of the jutting rock—but a step into eternity. But even that was preferable to the fate behind her. How she shuddered at the thought of the growling and snarling, and the gnashing of teeth.

For a second she hesitated ere she took the death-leap; and, in that brief time, the sleuth-hound cleared the space between, and with a bound bore her to the ground.

CHAPTER XI.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

IN the gray of the morning Dora saw her father and Henry Vinton returning from their search. She felt no qualms of conscience when she saw that Ella was not with them; in place of sorrow, she felt joy. The life that she should have cherished, she had offered upon the altar of her ambition.

She hastened down to meet them.

"Go tell her, Henry," said the despairing father. "Oh, my poor child!"

Henry rode up to where Dora was waiting for them, and alighted.

"We have not found her, Dora."

His tone was one of utter hopelessness, and Dora read it.

"Oh, Henry!" she exclaimed, bursting into tears, for they seemed always at command. "My darling sister! Where can she be? What did she mean? Oh, I never can forgive myself! yet I could not give you up, Henry."

During that night-ride, Henry Vinton had been reviewing his life for the few months just passed, and the record was unsatisfactory. He resolved that, whatever might come, he would no more perjure his soul by such conduct, unworthy of a man. The loss of Ella opened his eyes to the fact that she was all in all to him, and Dora nothing. Dora, with all her beauty, couldn't fill the void in his heart. Her dazzling brilliancy might, for a time, obscure that true passion which he felt for Ella, but *only* for a brief space. This knowledge, showing him how culpable had been his actions, determined his true course.

"Dora," said he, looking down into her lustrous eyes with a steady gaze that told her the worst was coming, "I have wronged you and your sister, and this night's work has shown me the path that I must take to make the only reparation within my power. I have long loved your sister, but your beauty and your kindness to my father, have sometimes led me from Ella's side to your own. Yet all the while I was at heart true to Ella. I never can return that love which you have confessed for me. Deeply as it may pain you to hear, and me to say it, I yet believe that you will thank me for it."

Dora listened without once interrupting him, yet the words were like daggers to her heart. She loved Henry Vinton with all the ardor of her Southern nature, and would risk life, yes, even a hope of hereafter, for a pledge that her love was returned,

But for all this, the loss of Arrancourt was tenfold worse. Ambition first, and love next.

His manner convinced her that no fair means would accomplish her ends, and she answered without any attempt at concealment:

"Henry Vinton, you taunt me with having confessed my love. I do not deny it, neither can I retreat. You may say that I am unwomanly, but remember that I have a man to battle against, and I must use the means that I have. I did love you, Henry. It grew upon me every day, and became a part of my being. I strove to win you, but strove too hard. Had I scorned you as you deserved, you would now be at my feet, begging for one word of love. But I could not; neither can I let you go."

"Dora, you know not what you say!" said Henry, alarmed at her vehemence, and troubled by the look with which she regarded him.

"I repeat," said she, slowly and firmly, "that I can not give you up. I shall hold you until death calls one of us away."

He stared in blank surprise, wondering if this could be the gentle, kind-hearted Dora of former times—this woman with flashing eyes, burning face and grating teeth. And he recoiled with a strange fear creeping over him.

"Dora, are you mad?" he exclaimed. "Have you lost your senses that you talk thus after what I have said?"

"I hold you if you hate me!" she replied, in a voice that sounded like the hissing of a serpent. "And you dare not attempt to break the bonds."

"Dare not, Dora?"

"Ay, dare not, Henry Vinton. You shall make me your wife!"

"Never!" said Henry, haughtily; for this woman was appearing in her true light, and her very beauty was becoming hateful. "Now I know that you are only seeking my father's wealth."

"And I will have it!" she replied, coldly. "Dare you tell me this, Dora?"

"I dare any thing to attain my ends, Henry Vinton."

They stood facing each other, he with a look of loathing that he made no attempt to conceal, she with an eye flashing with triumph—hot, pitiless and cunning.

"Do you consent?" she asked, tapping the grass with her little foot.

"Never! never!"

"Then," said Dora, turning toward the house, "the world shall know what happened beyond the seas; and the proud heir of Arrancourt shall hide his head in shame."

"Good God! you do not mean that?" exclaimed Henry, grasping her arm, while his body seemed shrinking with fear at the threat.

"I do mean it!" she replied, with a hollow, grating laugh, that went rasping through his brain painfully. "Only two things can close my mouth; death or marriage. The first you do not dare; the last, you must and shall do."

Henry staggered against the wall of the mansion. "Mercy!" he gasped, she looked so much like a pitiless fiend.

"I know no such word," she said, coldly. "There are but two in my vocabulary—ambition and love. All others I have blotted out for the present."

"Dora, you will kill me with your cursed madness. I know not what secret you hold, but its shadow has hovered over me for years."

"Your death will affect me but little, Henry Vinton. Whenever you choose to go, do not hesitate on my account. You can not take the wealth with you."

"Fiend! Devil!" he exclaimed.

"Spare your insults, sir," she said, haughtily. "They do not move me."

"Will any thing move you? Gold?"

"The whole or none, Henry Vinton. You have my answer and further words are useless."

She turned to go into the house, but he placed himself in her way.

"Not yet," he said, determinedly. "I must know the ground I stand upon. I must know how soon you demand this sacrifice. You will give me time to prepare."

"Certainly. It would not be proper, so soon after my sister's death."

"Death! A murderess, too?"

"No, Henry Vinton. I am free from that crime. You alone must bear the guilt of my sister's death. Your perfidy drove her away, a suicide."

Henry was now as calm as she. It was the calmness of despair. He looked her steadily in the eye, but she met his gaze without flinching.

"It is false, Dora Martin," he said, in slow, measured tones. "If Ella is dead, you murdered her!"

She flashed upon him a look of hatred that chilled him.

"Dead or not—murdered by me or by you, it does not alter the fact that you are in my power."

Henry turned away with a shudder, and Dora went into the house smiling triumphantly.

All through the day the search was continued, but no traces of Ella were found; and all day long Dora waited for the return of her bloodhound, but he did not come.

CHAPTER XII.

THE MERCIFUL BRUTE.

ELLA MARTIN felt the bloodhound's paws upon her breast, but she had no power to thrust him back. With a low wail of anguish and despair, she sunk senseless upon the rock.

The hound, instead of falling upon her, and tearing her in pieces, licked her hands, whining with delight.

After some moments Ella woke from her swoon, and found Prince sitting by her head, and gazing

into her face. Hardly comprehending her situation, she spoke to him:

"Good dog! good Prince!"

He crouched joyfully by her side, and allowed her to stroke his head. Ah, Dora Martin, you have made another mistake.

Ella rose to her feet overjoyed at her escape. No more thoughts of the dark, cold water!

"Good Prince, you will not hurt me, will you?" she said patting his head. "Good dog."

Prince took a few step toward the mansion; then stopped and waited for her.

"No—no; not that way, Prince," said she, sadly. "Come with me."

She started on; and, after some hesitation, Prince followed.

About daylight she suddenly came upon a little cabin, and before she could turn back, a familiar voice called to her:

"De good Lord save us, Missy Ella! where did ye come from?"

"Hush! Auntie Hersey?" exclaimed Ella, running gladly up to the black woman. "No one must know that I am here."

"Wal, I neber!" exclaimed the old negress, holding up her hands in astonishment, and opening her eyes until they looked really startling. "What is de trouble up to de hall?"

"Come in and I will tell you, aunty," said Ella, stepping toward the door.

The good woman led the way into the cabin, the dog following close upon Ella's footsteps.

"Now, aunty, if you will get me something to eat."

"Lord bless your sweet face! I ain't got nuffin fit to eat, but you shall have what dere is."

"Some of that nice corn cake, aunty."

"Yes, missy. And while I'm gittin' it, you tell me what's de matter ober dere."

Ella told her enough to satisfy her curiosity, interrupted often by her exclamations of wonder.

"Wal, I neber did hear de like! What is ye gwine to do?"

"I'm going to my uncle's in New York, aunty."

"Oh, Lord! so fur? Why ye neber will git back."

Ella smiled.

"I do not fear, aunty. If I can manage to get to the station, I can go all right. Where is Tom?"

"He's after de cow, missy."

"He will show me the way to the village?"

"He'll be glad to, missy. Now set right up and eat."

Ella's appetite was keen after her night-walk, and she ate the coarse, yet wholesome food, with a relish very pleasing to Auntie Hersey.

During the meal Tom came in. He was a bright-looking negro of twenty-one or two, and his mother told him enough of Ella's situation to give him a good understanding of it. It was well that she did so, for a few moments afterward Henry Vinton galloped up to the door, and inquired for Ella.

"I doesn't see'd her," said Tom, who had stepped outside the door; and Henry rode away again, little dreaming that he had been so near the object of his search.

Ella watched him until he was no longer in sight; then she sunk upon the floor, sobbing bitterly.

Auntie Hersey strove to comfort her, but finding it useless, left her to herself.

"She'll feel better for it," she said to Tom.

And Ella did feel better, and became almost cheerful.

Henry's appearance showed her the impossibility of attempting to reach the station by daylight, so she remained hid away in the cabin until the darkness came on.

Tom procured a horse from the neighboring plantation, and as soon as it was dark, Ella took her seat in the saddle, and Tom led the horse all the way, the dog following behind.

The station was reached in safety, and she learned that a train going north would arrive at midnight.

She waited in the depot, Prince never leaving her for a moment, and when the train rumbled up to the station she hurried aboard, taking Prince with her.

So the worst part of her journey was over. While she was speeding in safety to New York, Dora was gloating over her probable death, and already making her preparations for the grand event that would make her mistress of Arrancourt.

Henry was yet searching for Ella, and Moses Martin, ignorant of Dora's treachery, was lavishing his love upon the child that was spared to him, and mourning for the lost one.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CUNNING SCHEME.

PAUL RODNEY's novel and somewhat romantic introduction into Willhampton made him hosts of friends, so that when he stepped into Goldthwaite's shoes at the bank, he was well-known and succeeded the better for it.

Charles Matthews was charmed with him. In all his dealings with men he never yet found one who seemed to embody so much that was noble and manly as this orphan. At the end of the first month he declared that Paul was more than filling Goldthwaite's place.

"Paul, I shall increase your salary from this time," said the banker, as they walked home.

"You do me great honor," said Paul, yet showing the pleasure he felt.

"Not more than you deserve. I will tell you frankly that I expected much of you, but you have gone beyond my expectations."

"I am glad that I give you satisfaction," said Paul, "for I took the place with many misgivings."

"I never doubted your ability for a moment," said the banker, enthusiastically, "and I am so much

pleased with you that I venture to hope that, before many years, I can leave my business in your hands."

Paul pressed the banker's hand warmly, and his voice was husky as he replied:

"Mr. Matthews, I once almost cursed the fate which made me what I am. I had lost all faith in man, and, I am ashamed to say, almost doubted the existence of a God. Parents or friends I had none, and I believed that every one was against me—that in all the wide world there was not one helping hand. Bless God, I now see my error. You have saved me from infidelity. I know there is a just God over all; and I know, though he has chastened me, that he put it into your heart to save me from myself. With his help, I hope to always deserve the confidence you now have in me."

The banker was touched by this exhibition of genuine gratitude, and he replied:

"Paul, whatever may happen, you must know that you have a friend in me. Nothing can shake my confidence, and I hope that while we each live we shall not be separated."

Paul's life at the house was not so pleasant. The influence of Meta's presence grew stronger and stronger all the while, yet opened wider and wider the gulf between them. Since that day when he held Meta's form close to his heart, and beat his way through the surf, he had known that his happiness depended upon her; and this very knowledge was the source of keenest misery.

Although he had given no sign, yet she avoided him. Her manner was cold and distant. His step in the hall would check her mirth, and bring to her face a look of chilling reserve, begetting the same in his. So these two, loving each other, met every day, but drew no nearer; and none guessed the passions that surged beneath the calm surface of their lives.

"Oh, this misery!" wailed Meta, as she walked beneath the trees, far away from the house, that she might be alone. "This soul torture! Must I be driven into the streets by this love—my love? Oh, James Martin! what dread revenge you chose! Will it always follow me? Must I ever be tortured with that hissing—hissing whisper? Was it not enough to turn me into the streets, nameless, homeless, friendless? Oh, Paul, Paul! if you only knew! No! No! you must not! I could not outlive your scorn. Coldness, indifference, even hate I might bear, but never the contempt, the loathing. No, no, you never shall hear it! I'll love on and enjoy my misery; yes, enjoy it; loving you, and seeing you, I can bear it all; your coldness, George Matthews's hateful persistency and my foster-parents' love—bear it all if I am near you."

The summer breeze fanned her cheek, and whirled the old last-year leaves about her face; the fleeting insects buzzed close to her ear; and the happy birds sang their thrilling carols; but whispered naught of the sneaking listener to Meta's secret.

And Meta walked away, knowing not that George Matthews had heard her outspoken thoughts.

"Loves him, does she?" he hissed through his closed teeth; and his face wore a sickly pallor as though struck with the plague. "Loves Paul Rodney! And that secret? I care not, only that I might use it against her. Well, well, this has been a good hour's work; and my way is clear to me now. This immaculate Paul must lose his darling reputation. Ha! ha! won't it make my uncle's faith in humanity a little weak? I guess not, eh? George Matthews, here's a chance to show your skill in diplomacy. All I ask is the opportunity. I'll make one if there is no other way."

But the opportunity came to him.

One day when he was alone in the bank, a gentleman from a neighboring town came in to settle his account.

"I shall sail for Europe to-morrow," said he, "and as I do not know how long I shall be away, I am settling up all accounts. I saw Mr. Matthews in the city, and he referred me to you, Mr. Rodney. William Montrose."

George noticed the mistake, but did not correct it. He turned to the account, and Mr. Montrose paid it.

"I will take a receipt, if you please, Mr. Rodney."

Again the mistake; and it matured the plan for revenge which it at first suggested—revenge upon Paul Rodney for being loved by Meta. It was very simple and easily executed, for he was expert with the pen and could easily imitate Paul's bold chirography.

He wrote out a receipt, and signed Paul's name, which Mr. Montrose took, and left the bank.

Then he gave the gentleman credit on the books, and even Paul would have been loth to say it was not his own handwriting.

The money he, of course, put in his pocket, and that was all there was to do. Time would do the rest.

Paul came in soon after, but George was very busy with the books.

"I grew tired of idleness," said George, "and I thought I would give you a lift. I often helped Goldthwaite."

"Thank you, George. I am not feeling very well, and was wondering how I should get through with my work. If it is not too much trouble—"

"None whatever, Paul. I would rather do it than not. So go and lie down a while."

Paul thanked him again and turned away.

CHAPTER XIV.

DISMISSED.

"PAUL, did Mr. Montrose call to settle his account?" asked Charles Matthews.

It was nearly two weeks after the occurrence. "I do not recognize the name," said Paul looking up from his writing.

George did not lift his eyes, but his hand grew so unsteady that he put his pen in the rack and walked to the window.

"Why, yes, Paul," said the banker. "I saw him in the city before he came, and afterward. He had your receipt, for I saw it, and no one can mistake your signature."

"Then he must have been here," said Paul, thoughtfully, "yet I do not remember the name. I will look it up presently."

"No matter about that, Paul. I merely mentioned it because it happened to come to mind. One of our best men. I am sorry to lose his custom. I saw him aboard the vessel for Europe."

So the matter was dismissed for the time.

As soon as Paul had liberty, he went to the books. It was so strange that he did not remember the name of Montrose. But there it was:

"William Montrose, Cr.
By Cash, \$537 40."

And the date was June 12th. He was puzzled. He could not call to mind the circumstance. He thought of it all day, but at night was more perplexed than ever.

"Mr. Montrose did call," said he to the banker, as they rode home after banking hours; "but I do not remember him."

"June 12th, was it not?"

"Yes, sir. It seems so strange that I should forget his face so soon."

"You were busy at the time, probably. He was in a great hurry too. Fifteen minutes would have made him late for the train."

Paul was not yet satisfied. There was a look of mystery about the affair that he did not like. In the morning he ran over his cash balance and found a deficit of \$537.40.

He turned pale, and his hands trembled as he hastily looked them over again. Still the same.

He looked up, and George Matthews was at his elbow.

"Short, eh?"

"No," said Paul sharply, for he yet believed that he had overlooked something.

George smiled and turned away. He felt so secure that he could afford to smile.

"I guess Paul's cash accounts are getting mixed," he said, carelessly, to his uncle, as he took up the morning paper.

"Why?" asked the banker.

"I was just out there, and he seemed terribly agitated about something. I spoke to him, and the way he snapped me up was a caution."

"Well, if he is in trouble he will let me know," said the banker, confidently.

The words of George, so carelessly spoken, had the desired effect. The banker did not quite forget them, and hardly knowing why, he watched Paul more closely. He noticed that his manner was not quite so easy. He had lost part of his frankness. He seemed to avoid companionship, and grew pale and careworn.

"Paul, you are working too hard," said the banker. "You must take some rest."

"Oh, no," said Paul, quickly. "I do not need it."

"But you're getting pale and thin," persisted the banker. "I will keep your work up a few days if you will take a little recreation."

"No, no, Mr. Matthews. You are very kind, but I prefer to remain. Some other time, perhaps."

George smiled; and the banker saw it, just as he hoped he would.

"George, what do you suspect?" bluntly asked the banker, after Paul had left the room.

"Well, really, uncle, I do not know that I suspect anything; but I was amazed to see how frightened Paul looked when you spoke of giving him a vacation."

"But there was more meaning in that smile than mere amazement," said Mr. Matthews, curtly.

"Now what is it?"

"Uncle, I dislike to say anything against Paul Rodney; but he has acted strangely of late."

"Enough, sir," said the banker, with some asperity. "I understand you now."

The following morning the banker called Paul aside.

"Paul, you are in some trouble. Tell me all, and I will help you out."

If Paul had unburdened his mind then, all would have been made clear; but he could not. He yet had hopes of finding some error in his calculations. And if that failed him, he had hoped to replace the loss from his own savings.

"Do not ask me now, Mr. Matthews. I shall be all right again soon."

But the seed of suspicion had been sown, and George Matthews took good care it should germinate. By a careless word now and then, a look, or a smile, he kept his uncle in a state of perpetual uneasiness. At last he resolved to see for himself whether George had any real cause for his whisperings.

He went to the bank after dark, and remained half the night. When he came out, his face was white and stern.

In the morning he was closeted with Paul Rodney for a long time. What passed between them no one knew, but Paul did not go to the bank, neither did he wait for breakfast; and the next train to the city took Paul Rodney.

CHAPTER XV.

OUT IN THE STREETS AGAIN.

MRS. MATTHEWS kept the breakfast waiting for her husband and Paul.

George was walking the floor, uneasy, yet triumphant. He knew where his uncle had been for

half the night, and he could guess the consequences; but he felt greatly relieved when the banker entered the room alone.

"We are waiting, pa," said Mrs. Matthews.

"Where is Paul?"

"He has gone to the city."

His wife was about to question him further, but his stern, careworn look restrained her. Man and wife they had lived for thirty years, but she never saw that look on his face before. She felt that something dreadful had happened, but was far from suspecting the true state of affairs.

The meal was eaten in silence, and as they arose from the table, the banker said to George:

"You will take Mr. Rodney's place until he returns."

That was all that passed between them for weeks relating to Paul.

"Mother," said Meta to the banker's wife, one day, "where has Paul gone?"

"I know no more than you, Meta," replied Mrs. Matthews, in a whisper that sounded ominous. "I wouldn't say any more about him."

Meta did not reply, but she read in Mrs. Matthews's face something that roused her fears still more. She waited, hoping that the good woman would say more, but in vain; then she went away to think.

All day she roamed here and there, listless and lonely. Paul's presence was the greatest comfort of her young life. She could sit all day listening to his voice, yet knowing that the barrier could not be passed. She waited for his footsteps every night, and put on her guise of coldness to hide her joy at his return; and every morning she watched his tall form, as he passed out of sight, on his way to the bank, and thought how far removed he was from her.

But now he was gone, and even these pleasures were denied her. What happiness could there be where he was not? The heart-yearning was for naught. The strife against herself was over.

Toward evening she strolled down to the beach, and sat beneath the jutting rocks where she had often seen Paul. Sweet memories lingered round the spot. It was there that he was sitting that first day of their meeting. How lonely it seemed. How happy had been the time since then, yet how hopeless was that happiness? Would it ever come again? Would they ever meet again?

A shadow fell at her feet, and George Matthews stood before her. Was he so soon to take advantage of Paul's absence? Yes, he was there for that very purpose.

And how unexpected, how ill-timed were his words of love. It seemed to Meta almost like sacrilege, so soon after Paul's departure.

"Mr. Matthews," said she, "I am surprised that you approach me again with such words. My answer was final. Let us not become enemies by further pursuance of this distasteful subject."

"That is for you to determine," he replied, somewhat haughtily. "I do not seek your enmity, but your love."

"Enough, sir," commanded Meta. "You are forgetting yourself. Let me pass, sir."

"Not yet," he said, putting himself in her way.

"Stand aside!" cried Meta, indignantly, yet trembling with fear.

"Pardon my rudeness," sneered George, "but I thought if I only knew the secret that James Martin whispered in your ear—"

"Oh, God have mercy!" cried Meta, covering her face, which was blushing hot with shame. Then she rushed past him, and fled to the house. She ran to her own room to hide herself from sight, and throwing herself upon the bed, gave vent to her anguish in convulsive sobs and piteous moans, the hot, scalding tears of shame pouring down her cheeks.

"Oh! what have I done that I should be so tortured! Can I never escape his curse? Oh, it was false! I know it! I feel it! I will not believe it! Oh, mother! mother! come to me and tell me that it is false! Tell me that I have a right to bear my father's name! Father! mother! if you have gone to the spirit land, look down upon me in my desolation, and send me some token, that I may not, in my madness, curse my own life! If you are yet living, come to me! Send me the blessed words! Let the breeze whisper them, or the storm thunder them in my ears! Only let me hear them, and I will brave all else! They will not hear me! they will not come!"

All through the night she struggled with her despair, but in the morning she had reached a state of passive yielding, as the drowning man at last ceases to strive against the overwhelming element.

She waited until George Matthews went to the bank. Then she went down to her foster-mother.

The good woman had been very anxious about her.

"My darling, I have been up to your room several times," said she, "and you wouldn't let me in."

"Oh, mother! I could not. I am going away. I can not stay here another day."

"Why, Meta!" exclaimed the banker's wife; and she could not utter another word for the pain she felt.

"Yes, mother, I must go," said Meta again.

And her face was whiter than her snowy wrapper, while deep lines of suffering told of the night's struggle, and the swollen eyes, of the weeping.

"Child—Meta! oh, what do you mean?" asked the banker's wife, with a face as pale as Meta's.

"I can not tell you, mother. Oh, you never can know what misery it gives me to leave you, my second mother, and my dear pa, but something stronger even than love drives me from you. I must not stay! Oh, I can not—can not! Another night like the last would kill me!"

Unknown to her, the banker had appeared at the door, and listened in mute surprise to her words.

"What is the trouble with my little daughter?" he asked.

Meta started in affright; and when he saw her face, he cried in alarm:

"Wife! wife! what is it? Why, she looks like death!"

"I don't know, Charles. She is going away. We are going to lose her."

"No—no!" cried the banker. "We have lost Paul—we can not give up Meta!"

"Lost Paul!" cried his wife.

"He will not come back," said the banker, with a look half-stern, half-sad. "But why do you wish to leave us, Meta?"

"Don't, pa! please do not!" implored the suffering girl. "You have been too kind. I have wronged you by accepting all this kindness and love. I am not worthy of it. But it was so very pleasant, and made me so happy for a while. It is all over now. I must bid you good-by, dear Mr. Matthews, and mother."

The banker was about to remonstrate, but his wife took his arm and led him from the room.

"Charles, we can not help it. Her secret is not for us to know. She and Paul were sent to us in place of our own. We have sent Paul away, and Meta must now follow."

"Oh, God!" exclaimed the stricken man. "And I loved them so."

"Thy will be done!" murmured the good wife, but her heart was breaking.

Never did Meta before realize the love of these childless people as she did when, all ready for her departure, she went into the parlor to say good-by. She found them both in tears.

"Must you go?" implored the banker.

How hard it was for her to say that she must.

"Then good-by, my darling; but come back to see us if you can."

She kissed them and hurried away, her hand heavier by the weight of a well-filled purse.

"You are going after Paul?"

Meta met the baleful look of George Matthews's eyes, but made no reply.

"He is a thief—a felon!" he hissed.

Thus they parted.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STREET FRIENDS.

"I DON'T want to be hard on you, miss. I wouldn't say a word, only you know I must have my bread and butter as well as you, and I have nothing to depend upon but the rent; so if you can't pay me, I shall have to set you into the streets."

The speaker was a stout, well-dressed gentleman of middle age, and the listener was a young girl not out of her teens—pretty Ella Martin.

The white, scared face that she held up to him should have aroused some pity in his heart, but it was harder than the stone pavement on which he stood.

"You say you have no money?"

"Not a cent," answered Ella, quite abstractedly.

"Then, miss, I'll help you get out what few movables you have."

"I have nothing to move," she said, staring at him in a listless sort of way.

"We'll see about that, miss."

And he made a movement as if to push her aside; but he was met by a savage growl that sent him half-way across the street.

"Whose dog is that?" he asked, yet trembling with the fright he got.

"Mine, sir. Back, Prince!"

"Well, are you going?—you and the dog?"

"Yes, sir," said Ella, going into the house. "Stay here, Prince, and don't let him in. I don't like him."

The man stepped further away when he saw that Prince was alone, and took his station near a door; for who could tell what notion the brute might get into his head?

Ella soon reappeared and took her way up the street, with Prince trotting along after her; and the man waited until they were out of sight, ere he dared to venture across the street.

So Ella Martin was turned into the streets.

The few weeks that she had been in the great city, had been marked by such trials as only those can know who have been placed in like situations. She had failed in finding her uncle James, and friendless and unknown, with no skill in any handicraft whereby she might earn the food, clothing and shelter which must be had, she had roamed about the city, to her worse than a wilderness, watching her little purse day by day, until at last there was no money left.

Then came the street.

With a brain whirling dizzily, she dragged her weary way along. Close behind, turning neither to the right nor to the left, soberly marched the bloodhound, and half the busy crowd stopped to take a second look at the beautiful girl and her strange companion.

How the dumb brute had become endeared to her! He was her only friend. Patiently he bore hunger and cold; and, when she whispered to him of her wretchedness, he seemed to understand. And he was her safeguard. His instinct seldom erred, and his low growl, coupled with a sight of his sharp, white teeth, never failed to clear for his mistress a wide berth, even in the most dangerous locality.

Ella wandered about until nearly nightfall, wondering where, oh! where she would lay her head. She was so weary; and she sat down for a moment upon the steps of the tall church she was passing. Prince laid himself at her feet, and looking up into her face, asked with his great, wondering eyes—

"What next?"

"Ah, good Prince, I don't know what we shall do!"

she said, in seeming answer to his look. "I am so tired and hungry. Are you hungry, Prince?"

He gave a low whine in answer.

"Yes, I know you are. Well, we must beg a little. There is a lady coming now. She has her purse in her hand. I know she will not let me starve. She is young and good."

The suffering girl watched her as she slowly approached, but before she reached the spot where the two were waiting so anxiously, a man darted from a by-way, and snatching the purse, started to run.

"Oh, Prince!" cried Ella. "It is gone! The purse! No supper—no bed."

Then there came another thought.

"Take him, Prince!" she shouted, clapping her hands to spur him on.

But all he needed was the word. With a few long, rapid leaps, he reached the thief. Then there was a short struggle, a moment of cursing by the man, and the dog's snarling; then all was still.

"Oh, what have I done!" cried Ella, in alarm, as she hurried to the spot where the man was lying so still, with the dog's grip at his throat.

"You have caught a rascal," said a policeman, who had witnessed the whole affair from a distance; "or, your dog has, so it's all the same. Now call him off."

"Here, Prince! let him alone!"

Prince obeyed rather reluctantly, and the man, feeling no ill effects, save a slight shortening of his breath, sprang to his feet to find himself in the custody of the policeman.

"Here's your purse," said the officer to the lady, who had hardly recovered from her astonishment.

She thanked him and then turned to Ella.

"I am so much obliged to you, my dear girl. What should I have done! It was all the money I had in the world."

"But it looked so much," said Ella, innocently.

"Oh, no. But you have served me in one thing; please do so in another, and you shall have half the money. I am a stranger here, and need a home. Take me to yours, please."

"Home!" said Ella. "I have none now."

"Oh!"

The exclamation was one of pain.

"No home! I know how to pity you. Have you friends?"

Ella pointed silently to the dog.

"I can not even call a dog my friend," was the bitter reply.

"Prince shall be a friend to us both," said Ella, brightening up a little.

"And you will be my friend, too?"

"Yes," said Ella, "if my friendship is worth anything."

"It is worth every thing," was the earnest reply.

"Now let us find some place to stay to-night. Then we will get some work, and be so happy. My name is Meta."

Yes, it was Meta, turned into the streets again.

"And mine is Ella Martin."

"Martin!" exclaimed Meta, trembling with dread.

"Do you know James Martin?"

"I have an uncle by that name, but I never saw him."

"Thank God for that," said Meta, greatly relieved.

"You think I am a strange girl, don't you? Well, I suppose I am. But, there is a neat little cottage. Let us see if they will keep us to-night. I do so dislike a great hotel where everybody is staring at everybody else."

The two girls went up to the door, and Meta rung the bell. A lady came to the door.

"We are strangers in the city," said Meta, "and have called to see if you will let us stay all night."

The lady, who was scarcely more than a girl herself, looked at the plain, modest attire of the applicants, and said, kindly:

"Your request is quite unusual, but I will not turn you away. Is the dog yours?"

"He is mine," said Ella.

"And he must go with us," spoke Meta, quickly.

"He has just caught a thief who snatched my purse."

The dog now stepped up and looked the lady in the face, as though adding his appeal to theirs.

"I cannot resist that," said the lady, with a smile.

"Come in and welcome."

She led them into a pleasant little apartment, sitting-room and parlor combined, and while they were removing their wrappers, she went out to draw the tea.

She then called them to supper.

Prince was not forgotten, and enjoyed a huge plateful all by himself.

The meal finished, both the girls helped the lady, Mrs. Weller, to clear away the supper dishes, for she kept no servant; and then they all repaired to the room adjoining.

Ella frankly related her strange experience since arriving in the city, and Meta told the curious incident that brought them together. Of course Prince came in for his share of praise. Then good Mrs. Weller, happy in her new wedded life, had much to say of the loved husband; and the time passed pleasantly for an hour or more, after which the young wife showed her guests to their room.

Ella and Meta were both very tired, and they soon fell asleep, with Prince, who had very positively refused to be separated from them, lying on a rug at the head of the bed.

Some time in the night Ella awoke, feeling strangely, and, while lying there wondering what had disturbed her, she heard a faint noise at the window. The room was on the ground, and her first thought was that somebody was trying to break into the house. Not daring to move, she kept her eyes fixed on the window, and saw a dark form draw itself into the room, and creep stealthily toward the

bed. By a faint light through the open shutter, she caught the gleam of a knife. Palsied with terror, she could only lie there and wait.

Nearer—nearer crept the assassin, until he stood peering down into her face. How like him had Dora Martin once stood, yet Ella had escaped unharmed. Would she now? She was asleep then; now she was staring into the murderous eyes, for her terror seemed to give her new sight to see in the darkness.

She heard Meta's deep, regular breathing as she slept on, unconscious of all danger. She attempted to move her arm to wake her, but she had not the power. No hempen cord, no forged steel, could have held her more firmly than did that overpowering terror at the sight of the dim outlines of that midnight assassin, standing there by her bedside, just ready to strike the blow which would send her to eternity.

Once she would have coveted the stroke, so that it sent her to oblivion, and begged that he would not delay; now she prayed for life—thought her prayers, for her tongue refused its office—and implored Divine aid for her friend.

Ah, how hopeless! She saw the arm uplifted, and knew there was but a second; but in that second the thought of a deliverer flashed through her mind. With the thought came speech and motion.

"Take him, Prince!" she cried. Then she closed her eyes and awaited the result.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TIGRESS SHOWS HER TEETH.

DEEPER and deeper settled the gloom around old Arrancourt. Norman Vinton, harassed by repeated visits from the dreaded phantom, which happened always unexpectedly, was but the shadow of his former self. He lived entirely secluded from every one but Dora. She alone kept him from absolute insanity.

Moses Martin, too, had grown gloomy and silent under his dire sufferings. He had nearly given up all hope of ever seeing Ella again, yet was continually searching for her. How much more terrible would have been his misery, had he known the full extent of Dora's wickedness.

Neither was Henry Vinton like himself. He wandered about the vast estate of Arrancourt, looking in every possible and impossible place, for some trace of his lost Ella. He never dreamed that she could go further than the boundaries of Arrancourt, without having been seen, and he had inquired for miles around. There was but one solution; the dark waters of the lake had closed over her. And yet—

Ah, that one spark of hope! It kept him alive, and sent him further on his search. He knew that Moses Martin had a brother in New York. Perhaps she had eluded them, and gone there. It was worth a trial; but he could not go without Dora's consent. How he loathed himself.

"Dora, I am going away in quest of Ella," said he, the same day he formed the resolution. "I must know her fate, and then I will answer you. Keep your secret, I know not what it is, but the dread of it has been my curse ever since I came to Arrancourt."

Why did the ambitious woman allow him to leave her sight? It could not be for pity. It was that she believed the excitement would sooner make him forget her sister.

"Baby!" she muttered, but he did not hear it. "Silly fool! I shall hate him yet for his weakness—his goodness."

"You do not answer me, Dora?"

"Because I hate to let you go, Henry. It will be useless. Ella, poor child, is no more. I feel it—I know it, though I have seen or heard nothing, and—"

"And you ask me to marry you!" suddenly exclaimed Henry, while a look of the deepest detestation was stamped upon his face.

The question was a surprise to Dora, but she rallied instantly.

"I did ask you, Henry Vinton, but I do not now. I command you. Now go on your wild-goose chase, and when you find that I have spoken the truth, come back to me, or—"

He went. And close upon his track was a human sleuth-hound, Allan Wentworth, working for the love of the beautiful maniac, for what else can we call Dora Martin?

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCHEMER FOILED.

THE loss of Paul Rodney and Meta had a marked effect on Charles Matthews. He had loved Meta with true parental affection. Indeed, but few parents so fondly cherish their children as did he the orphan waif. He missed her in so many ways that it seemed he would never get over the loss.

He had looked upon Paul with a different feeling, yet none the less binding. He had admired him as something more than common man; and when his confidence in him was shaken, he lost faith in all mankind.

The men at the bank felt the change; and old Morton Talbot, who had been with Charles Matthews ever since he commenced business, was so hurt that he spoke to him about it.

"Charles," said he, "do you mistrust us all just because you have found one man delinquent? Must the whole world be gauged by Paul Rodney's dishonesty?"

"Who told you that Paul Rodney was dishonest?" sharply demanded the banker.

"Why, bless your soul! all Willhampton knows about it, even to the amount he was short. Ah, Charles, you made a great mistake."

"I do not profess perfection," said the banker, testily. "But I want to know who has been telling

this story about Paul Rodney. Where do you think it started?"

"Why, don't you know, Charles? If you don't I mustn't tell."

"You must tell me!" was the stern reply.

"Mr. Charles," said old Morton, slowly, "if it had been for your interest, I should have told you before; but as it is not, I shall not say another word. Now, all I ask is for you to trust us the same as ever."

The old man waited a moment for some reply, but as none came, he stepped carefully out of the office, feeling but little better.

This was the first intimation to Charles Matthews that the true reason for Paul's departure was known. He had purposely worked very cautiously in the matter. At first he believed Paul innocent, and wished to shield him from unjust suspicion; but when he saw indubitable proofs of his guilt, he worked for his own interests, and congratulated himself on having kept the whole affair a secret. The knowledge that all was known, combined with his other troubles, made him exceedingly wroth, and very unlike Charles Matthews.

He was in this vexed frame of mind when his nephew entered the office.

"George," said he, "do you know anything about this Paul Rodney affair?"

"Well, not much, uncle," said George, not quite at ease.

"How much?"

"Why, you remember my words that led you to examine the books—"

"Who told you that I examined the books?" exclaimed the banker, in an angry tone that startled George.

"No one, sir. I merely guessed it."

"What business have you to guess anything about my affairs?"

"I could not very well help it."

"Well, what else have you guessed?"

"Nothing, sir," replied George, who was also becoming angry.

"What do you know?"

"I know that Paul Rodney was sent away for taking money that did not belong to him."

"And you have told this?"

"I presume I have."

The banker's face grew cold and stern.

"Well, sir, it is the last of my affairs that you will have to gossip about. You can go, sir, and the sooner you can make it convenient to absent yourself from my house, the better pleased I shall be. I wish you a very good-day."

So the banker and his wife were left alone; and very lonely they were, too.

"Mother," said the banker, "we can never live so. We must have some of them back. Have I wronged Paul, mother?"

"Yes, Charles; he was innocent."

CHAPTER XIX.

ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD.

PRINCE was only waiting for Ella's command. He had not been put upon the track, and, though he knew this man was an intruder, and was crouched ready for a spring, he yet was waiting for the word. The moment Ella spoke, he was at the ruffian's throat, and the two went struggling to the floor.

Ella screamed and covered her face with the sheets. Meta awoke, and hearing the growling and snarling in the room, echoed Ella's cry of terror. Then hurried feet came along the passage, and Mr. Weller entered the room, bearing a light in one hand and a revolver in the other. His wife was just behind.

Weller gave a grim smile of satisfaction when he saw the man's face and at once produced some handcuffs for the wretch; but Prince warned him off with a growl.

"Oh, he is your prisoner is he?" laughed Weller, not in the least disconcerted. "He is worth an even thousand dollars."

Then he spoke to Meta to call the dog away. Prince, however, would not obey her voice, and Ella now called him.

The faithful hound instantly released his hold, but stood ready to take another grip if he thought it necessary.

The villain was not injured in the least and the moment he found himself free, he sprang to his feet and made for Weller. But the detective was prepared for this.

"Not so fast, Flashy," said he, coolly planting a well directed blow straight between the eyes. Weller was a man of great muscular strength, and the stroke felled the man to the floor.

He followed up his advantage, and had the irons upon his wrists in a twinkling.

"There, sir, I have a hold on you now," said Weller, "that will not let up very soon. Now move along, and I'll find you some lodgings."

The man obeyed, for the detective's revolver was uncomfortably near his head.

There was no more sleep for Meta and Ella; nor, indeed, for Mrs. Weller, so they all went down to the kitchen and began preparations for an early breakfast.

"Mrs. Weller, do all the men in the city carry pistols, and those funny bracelets that your husband put upon the man?" asked Ella, after the excitement was over.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Weller; "Andrew is a detective."

"A real detective!" exclaimed Ella. "I've heard so much about them, but I never saw one before. Did you, Meta?"

But Meta was very busy, and pretended not to hear. She had seen one at Willhampton, and it was the same Mr. Weller. She had not forgotten his face or the questions he asked her.

Ella thought she had grown strangely reticent since the preceding evening, and rallied her upon her serious, woe-begone aspect.

Meta smiled and attempted to throw off the incubus which the sight of the detective had settled upon her, but she could not. Poor child! Wherever she went her wretchedness followed her.

"Will he know me?" she thought. "Must I be driven from here, too? Is there no rest for me this side of the grave?"

She evinced much agitation when Mr. Weller came in, but he gave no sign that he recognized her, and she felt more at ease.

"I congratulate you, ladies, on a good night's work," said he, with a smile. "Your reward is just one thousand dollars."

Ella looked her surprise, but Meta understood at once.

"Oh, Ella, how fortunate!" said she. "You are almost rich."

Yet Ella was puzzled, and the detective explained to her that the gentleman captured by Prince, was an old offender, for whom a reward was offered.

"A thousand dollars for that man!" exclaimed Ella, with a look that was almost ludicrous. "Well, Prince, I guess we had better continue the business."

"You couldn't take me for a partner?" asked Meta, playfully.

"You are one already," replied Ella. "But what do you get, Mr. Weller?"

"My life," he answered, earnestly, glancing at his wife. "You occupied our sleeping-room last night, and the rascal's knife would have found my heart, had you not been providentially put in my place, with your noble dog to watch over you."

"Oh, Andrew! I never thought of this!" exclaimed the young wife, as she threw her arms about her husband's neck, weeping tears of thankfulness.

"It is worth more to me than all the reward," said Ella, with true sympathy. "Ah, Prince, you know not what good you have done."

But Prince looked up so knowingly, that she doubted the truth of her words.

Flashy Dick was remanded to prison for a term of years that would probably last his natural life.

The reward offered for his capture was promptly paid to Mr. Weller, who in turn gave it to Ella. She insisted that he should take a share of it, but he would not.

"You know, Ella," said he, "that I have received the lion's share already, for what is gold to a life?"

Nevertheless Ella really wished that the good people should have their share of this money, and, unknown to Weller, she placed a sealed package in the young wife's hands to be opened after she went away. The balance of the money she divided equally with Meta. Meta took it, but she laid it by for Ella's use, should she need it.

Their next step was to procure some employment.

"We must go away from here," said Meta, who could not get over her fears. "At least I must."

"I shall go where you go," said Ella.

"Then let us go far away from here, into some quiet country-place."

The girls had exchanged secrets, all but that whispered revenge of James Martin—Meta could not tell that—and Ella felt justified in remaining away from her father until she could meet Henry Vinton without betraying her misery, so she readily consented to be governed by Meta's wishes.

They informed Mr. Weller of their determination, and he promptly offered his advice. He knew of a family who were in want of a teacher for their grandchild, and he had no doubt that they would accept the services of both.

He opened correspondence with the Moreleys, and received very satisfactory replies; but how far he used his influence, the girls never knew.

So they bid good-by to the kind Wellers, and set out for Palm Grove.

CHAPTER XX.

"TO THE FRONT, MARCH!"

ALMOST hopeless, Henry Vinton set out for New York. He had procured the address of Doctor James Martin from his brother, but he had no better success than Ella. To be sure, he found the house with that silver door-plate, but the doctor was in Europe. He never thought to inquire if Ella had been there. The very fact of the doctor's absence seemed to imply that she had not.

That night a letter for Dora Martin was dropped into the post-office. It read:

"Doctor James Martin is in Europe. Ella has not been here. Henry will remain in the city for a few days."

"ALLAN WENTWORTH."

Henry spent two or three days in wandering about the city, hoping that some chance would bring him tidings of the lost one; but he at length became aware of the futility of further search without help. Much as he detested it, he resolved to employ a detective. He returned to his hotel, and dispatched a message to Mulberry street, which was promptly answered by our friend Weller in person.

Henry was sitting at a table with his head leaned upon his hand in a very despondent attitude.

"What's that hangdog doing at your door?" was the first question of the detective.

"I'm sure I know nothing about it," said Henry, stepping to the door.

"Oh, you'll not find him," said Weller. "It doesn't matter much—he's of no special account. You sent for me, Mr. Vinton? Andrew Weller, from Mulberry street."

"Yes, sir. I need help."

"In what way?"

The detective leaned his chair back against the wall, threw one leg over the other, and tipped his hat down over his eyes in a way that was suggestive of a comfortable nap. Nevertheless, Henry went on, concealing nothing of importance.

Weller heard him through without comment. Then he arose and stepped toward the door.

"Where shall I find you when I want you, Mr. Vinton?"

"If I leave here, I will send you my address," said Henry. "But do you give me no hope?"

"I will see you again," replied Weller as he bowed himself out of the room.

Hardly was the detective out of hearing, when there came a loud rap at Henry's door, followed by the entrance of a man in military garb.

"How—are—you—Hank Vinton!" exclaimed the new-comer, boisterously, shaking Henry's hand until the continued motion grew painful.

"Will Harding!" exclaimed Henry, in pleased surprise.

"Captain Harding, if you please. But, when did you arrive?"

"Three days ago, Will—excuse me, captain."

"That's right, my boy. I thought you had not been here long, you look so blue. But I've found a panacea for the blue-devils, no matter what is the cause. Join the army. What do you say?"

"Not yet, captain. I have other work to do."

"Fudge! You're in love, I'll bet."

Henry colored slightly.

"I've guessed it the first pop! Well, Hank, it is good business, provided always that you have a good partner; but it won't do for times like these. Let it rest for awhile and come with us. We've got the jolliest set of fellows, and our colonel can't be beat. What do you say?"

"Let me think of it awhile, captain. I certainly can not say now."

"Just as good as gone!" cried the captain. "I'll have you a commission by Saturday night. We want one more good captain. Now good-night, old boy. Go to bed and dream of the lady as much as you please, but when you wake,

"Gird on your armor and be marching along!"

Henry Vinton had but little idea of joining the army when he asked for time to decide, but as the days passed and he heard nothing whatever of Ella, he grew to think more seriously about it. It certainly offered strong inducements; a life of wild adventure and daring; of excitement, to drive away his sorrow; perhaps an honorable death, to escape the dishonor which he felt sure Dora could heap upon him.

Then there came a letter from Mr. Martin, saying that he had given up all hopes of meeting his lost child again in this world. And there were a few lines from Dora, reminding him of the terrible power she had. He replied to Mr. Martin, but not a word to Dora. Her threat decided him—drove him further away.

Though he did not write to Dora, she heard of him. Allan Wentworth wrote, and received the answer:

"Henry Vinton must never return alive to Arrancourt!"

Allan Wentworth pocketed the crisp bank-note, muttering:

"The devil is in the woman; but I must do it."

So Henry Vinton became Captain Henry Vinton, and the commanding officer of the regiment was Colonel Paul Rodney.

Another week passed and the regiment was ordered to the front.

Just as they were embarking, detective Weller stepped up to Captain Vinton, put a little card into his hand, and went away again.

The captain grew pale and staggered against the car, as he read Ella's address on that little bit of pasteboard, but it was too late. He heard Colonel Rodney's voice, ordering his company into the cars, and he mechanically attended to his duties.

Dogging his steps everywhere he went, waiting, seeking some chance to do Dora's bidding, was her human, or inhuman, sleuth-hound, private Allan Wentworth.

CHAPTER XXI.

A VILLAIN'S WOOING.

META and Ella found Palm Grove a delightful retreat; and the Moreleys were very pleasant people.

The girls' duties were merely nominal, and the time passed agreeably, saving their own secret griefs, which even a paradise could not assuage.

"What a queer world this is," said Meta. "What we want we can not get, and what we detest is thrust upon us. I have been thinking of George Matthews, and what might have been, had I not refused his tempting offer. No doubt, by this time, I should be a staid matron in stiff silks and stiffer satins, with a ruffled cap on my head and a lie in my mouth for everybody."

They were strolling through the crimson-tinted woods belonging to the Moreley estate, one autumn afternoon, the crisp leaves rustling under their feet, while showers of them fell from the already half-bare limbs above them.

"Why, Meta! how strangely you talk!" exclaimed Ella, laughing.

"I feel strangely, sister mine. My thoughts are rambling here and there in the wildest confusion. I do believe that George Matthews is a villain. I have thought much about him lately, and to-day I can scarcely get him from my mind. He hated Paul. Oh, Paul! Paul! where is he, that he does not come to me?"

"Why, Meta!" exclaimed Ella, really alarmed. "What has come over you? I never knew you so before. Let us go back."

"Not yet, Ella. I will try to act like myself, but I do feel as though something dreadful will happen soon. Oh, Ella! we are not happy! I know you are not, and what would you think if I told you that I am in misery all the time? Oh, Ella, shall we ever be happy?"

Ella was shocked at this strange outburst of an overburdened heart, yet it was but the counterpart of her own feelings.

"We must bear it patiently," said she, "and be thankful that it is no worse."

"Patiently!" cried Meta, chafing like a caged bird. "Patiently! I never can do that, Ella! It is killing me! Why, was it not enough to turn me into the streets! Ella, I shall go mad! Paul! I love you so, yet you are as one dead to me!"

"Hark! hark! did you hear any thing? a rustling of the leaves? Come, Meta, let us go back."

"No, no," said Meta, quickly. "Let us rather see what it is. I fear nothing now!" Meta's cheeks were crimson. A feeling of desperation held possession of her, that made her careless of danger.

"Where is Prince?"

"Chained at the house. I wish we had him here."

"Never mind, Ella. We will go a little further."

"Only a little way, then," said Ella, looking cautiously ahead.

"There, Meta!" she suddenly exclaimed, seizing her arm, and turning to flee.

But Meta could not run. She seemed chained to the spot. A face was just visible through the bushes—a face changed from what it was when she saw it last, yet unmistakably the face of George Matthews.

"At last I have found you," said he, with a look in his dark eyes that made Meta shudder. "But you give me no greeting, Meta. Aren't you glad to see me?"

"No, I am not!" said Meta, disdainfully. "Were your words when I saw you last calculated to beget a feeling of gladness to meet you again? Have you forgotten the lie?"

"Lie! it was no lie! Paul Rodney is a thief, and—"

"Stop, George Matthews!" cried Meta, blazing with indignation. "I will not hear it!"

"I presume it is distasteful to you," sneered he; "nevertheless it is true. But I did not come to speak of Paul Rodney. I am here on my own account, and while we walk along I will explain."

"We do not desire your company," said Meta, turning away. "Come, Ella."

"Not so fast, my pretty one. I desire your company, and that of your companion as well. You must come with me."

"I will not go with you!" cried Meta, angrily, as she took Ella's arm and started for the house.

"We will see," said George. "Ho! there!"

At the word, a dozen men arose out of the bushes all around them; rough, repulsive-looking men, ready for any atrocious deed.

"Oh, Paul! come to me!" shouted Meta, in her extremity; for who else in all the wide world could she appeal to? Not one friend in all the universe to save her from this cruel fate. Paul! Paul! don't you hear me?"

George Matthews laughed a bitter chuckle of rage and derision. To hear an avowal of this love a second time—thrown in his face so mockingly—roused all the cowardly cruelty of his nature.

"Yes, call—shout—scream for him, but he will not come! He does not hear you. He has forgotten your pretty face, for he knows that—"

Meta turned a face to him whiter than death.

"Not that—not that!" she implored.

"Yes, that!" shouted the craven. "That! I told him! He would laugh at you now. Spurn you for a—what was it that Doctor James told you? Ha! ha!"

But Meta was like a statue, rigid as the marble itself, struck senseless and motionless by the dastard's base aspersions.

"Seize them and mount!" commanded Matthews.

And the poor girls, powerless to prevent, were hurried away.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN THE TOILS.

THE shrill notes of the bugle rung out the call to halt, and Colonel Paul Rodney alighted and threw himself on the grass to wait for the wagon-train to come up.

He was perfectly at home in this wild life. He loved it; and it was so much in consonance with his feelings. Days and nights in the saddle could not curb his restlessness. He craved excitement and danger, to deaden the torturing thoughts that made his life miserable; and he braved death with a fearlessness that made his name a synonym of heroism. He was worshiped by his men, and wherever was seen his tall form, battling with the foe, could be found his faithful followers, ready to die in his defense.

Only second to him was Captain Henry Vinton. He lacked the commanding presence, but in reckless daring, in a total disregard of danger in every form, he was not surpassed by even Colonel Rodney.

And these two men, drawn together by similar tastes, by their utter loneliness, by their griefs and their despair, were the staunchest of friends.

Henry rode up to where the colonel was sitting, and took a place at his side.

"Colonel, I have come to ask a favor."

"It is already granted, captain; that is, if within my power."

For answer, Captain Vinton placed in the colonel's hand the card which Detective Weller had given him so many months before.

"And you have waited all this time!" exclaimed

Colonel Rodney. "Captain, you are a martyr to principle or patriotism! which?"

"Neither, I fear, colonel; but to my own doubts." "Doubt no longer. But how in the world did that detective learn her hiding-place so far from where any one would think of searching? It is a mystery to me. But Henry—Paul spoke with much hesitation—you may be too late."

"I have thought of all that," replied the captain, sadly; "but, I can not rest without a trial. Can I go?"

"Captain, you wrong me by repeating the question."

"Thank you, colonel. I will start for Palm Grove at once."

"Pick your men, captain."

"I go alone, colonel."

"I fear to have you, captain. We are yet on hostile ground."

"Very true; but I must go alone. I will be very careful, and shall return before you break camp."

"You must be very careful," again cautioned the colonel.

With a feeling of joy that he had not known for long months, Henry vaulted into the saddle, and set out for Palm Grove.

He rode cautiously at first, scanning both sides of the road, for now he was so near to Ella, life was very sweet.

The road, nearly all the way, was through a thick wood, yet, after he had traversed half the distance and met nothing to excite suspicion, he relaxed his vigilance, and gave himself up to a reverie of anticipated pleasure.

It was a fatal mistake. Leaving the camp but a moment after him, was a wily foe, private Allan Wentworth. By a shorter cut he reached a lovely spot in the woods in advance of his victim, and stationing himself in a dense hazel thicket, he awaited his coming.

Henry, doubting and fearing for the success of his mission, had allowed his horse to slacken speed as he neared Palm Grove, and absorbed in thought, he rode abreast of the ambushade.

His horse gave him warning of the danger, but he did not heed it. A desperate face rose out of the bushes, and with the suddenness of a thunderbolt, the fatal shot was given, and Captain Vinton reeled and fell from the saddle, while his terrified horse dashed away toward Palm Grove.

Coming out of the woods but a little way from where Captain Vinton fell, was George Matthews's party. They heard the shot, but could not overtake the assassin. They saw the body in the road, and halting long enough to see that the man was yet alive, George Matthews left a squad to take him to the camp, while he rode on with the remainder of the party and his fair prisoners.

Reaching the camp, Ella and Meta were shown every attention compatible with their situation. George Matthews vacated his own tent for their use, and took them supper himself.

"I am really sorry to inconvenience you, ladies," said he, with mock courtesy; "but as the fortunes of war have placed you in my power, I beg that you will judge me leniently."

Meta smiled with cold disdain.

"Your acts call for all the apologies that you can invent, yet you can make it nothing more nor less than a cowardly war upon defenseless women. A dozen men or more to capture us!"

The coward heard her through, while a look of cruel cunning became visible on his face.

"The scorn of such as you affects me but a trifle," said he with a smile that meant more than his words; "at least it does not change my purposes toward you. You spurned me once, but you never shall again."

He ended this demoniacal thrust with a short, hard, cruel laugh, that chilled the blood of his helpless listeners. And thus he left them. Speechless, they nestled closer to each other, and bore the torture. The supper went untasted and unnoticed. They could hear the steady tramp of the guard, as he paced to and fro before the tent, the laugh and ribald jests of a party grouped around the fire, and occasionally the voice of George Matthews; but no word of comfort, of hope, of succor.

But hark! What is it that lights up Ella's face with blessed hope? Does she hear Henry Vinton's voice as he stands by the fire? Henry Vinton, alive and well, save the little bullet's furrow on his head which only stunned him? Can she tell that voice from all the rest? Yes, from all the world! And she forgets their parting—forgot everything only that he is near in their dire extremity.

With a cry of joy, she disengaged herself from the wondering Meta's arms, and rushing out of the tent, regardless of the sentinel's glistening bayonet, she fell, sobbing, on Henry's breast.

What joy, what bliss, to once more hold the dear form in close embrace! Then came the harrowing remembrance of their situation.

"Oh, my darling! how have I found you?" he moaned.

And she looked up and cried:

"Save me! save me! Henry. And Meta!"

"Meta! where is she?"

"A prisoner like myself. Can you save us from his power?"

"God helping me, you shall be saved," said Henry; "but, alas! I am a prisoner too."

"Oh, Henry!"

"Take courage, my darling. I will save you or die with you."

George Matthews now approached, and almost brutally forced Ella back to the tent.

"So Paul did not come!" moaned Meta, bursting into tears. "Will he ever come? But I am selfish. You have found Henry. I will rejoice with you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TRAIL RUN DOWN.

COLONEL RODNEY waited for Captain Vinton until the sun was an hour high, and then ordered the command forward. Even then he was loth to believe that any harm had befallen Henry, but to make matters sure, he left a squad of men, under the command of Captain Harding, to go over to Palm Grove.

Captain Harding was not quite so easy about Henry, and he ordered his men into a gallop. They did not take the same road that Henry chose, although they did not know it at the time. The horses were reeking with foam when the troop reached Palm Grove.

"Has Captain Vinton been here?" asked Harding of an old negro, who stood at the gate watching their approach.

"Is 'pec' he hab," said the old man, "kase de gals is gone."

"Have you seen him?"

"Lor' bless ye! no, I habn't, and I doesn't want to."

Finding that he was only wasting time, Captain Harding rode on to the house, where he found the inmates hurrying about in the wildest confusion.

Mr. Moreley quickly acquainted him with the facts, so far as known, of the disappearance of Meta and Ella.

Harding was surprised at the mention of Meta, for he had incidentally learned something of Paul's history; but that was neither time nor place for conjecture; so, after a moment's thought, in which he determined to follow after the lost girls—he believed that Captain Vinton had been captured by the same party—he asked to be shown where they were last seen.

"I can not tell you that," said Mr. Moreley, "but I think Prince will put you on the track."

"Take me to him at once."

Moreley led the way to the dog's kennel.

"A bloodhound!" exclaimed Harding, in surprise.

"I thought it was a man."

"Prince is better than any man for this business," said Moreley. "Be ready for a start and I will loose him."

The moment Prince was free, he gave a glad bound, and almost instantly struck the scent.

"Forward!" cried Captain Harding, excitedly; and the troop pressed on.

When Prince reached the spot where George Matthews and his party surrounded the girls, he was puzzled for a moment by the great number of tracks; but Captain Harding saw the trail plainly, and kept on. They soon came into the road, where they saw that a halt had taken place. Captain Harding found the spot where Henry fell from his horse, and picked something bright from the dust. It was Henry's ring.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "I fear we are too late. Forward with all haste!"

They pressed on again and found the camping-ground. With scarcely a halt, they resumed the pursuit.

Just after noon, as they rode to the crest of a hill they saw, in a little ravine just below them, the party they were searching for.

"At them, boys!" shouted Captain Harding; and down the hill they dashed. The surprise was complete, and the struggle brief.

"But where is Meta?" cried Ella.

"And George Matthews?" spoke Henry.

Sure enough, they were gone.

"What will Colonel Rodney say?" exclaimed Captain Harding. "Henry, we must find her! We will ride over to the village and find a place for Miss Martin to remain, and then we'll scour the country."

"Yes, yes," said Henry, almost as much interested as though it were Ella.

But where was Prince?

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TEMPTRESS AT WORK.

DORA MARTIN stood at the door of the library in a listening attitude. She had just passed through the hall, but the sound of horses' hoofs on the hard road had attracted her attention.

After waiting a moment, she hastened to the door and looked out. A horseman was coming up the avenue, and when he saw Dora, he urged his horse to a quicker pace, and was soon at her side.

"Well?" said she, coldly, yet trembling with eagerness to hear what private Allan Wentworth had to tell her.

"Hank Vinton will trouble you no more," he whispered, scarcely above his breath.

"Come away from the house," said Dora, taking him by the arm.

"Now, how do you know?"

"I saw him fall," said he.

Dora clapped her hand to her heart, for with the knowledge of Henry Vinton's death, she realized what it was to sacrifice love for ambition.

"How? When?" she asked, after a pause, during which the man was bending looks of the deepest admiration upon her.

"In battle," he replied, choosing to keep his own part in the affair a secret. "Two days ago."

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"I know it, he replied.

And he thought he did.

"Then you had no hand in it?"

Wentworth smiled.

"What does it matter?"

"Nothing in particular," said she, carelessly, "only that it does not put me in your debt."

"You are already beholden to me," he replied.

"I ask no stronger hold upon you."

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, betraying no agitation.

"Nothing in particular," he replied, imitating her careless words and manner, "only I thought we had been in partnership so long, that we might continue so."

Dora did not start or change color, although she well knew what was coming, but her active brain never worked so busily as it did then, searching for some way out of this difficulty.

"Speak plainly. Mr. Wentworth," she said, frigidly.

"I thought I spoke plainly enough," said he, reproachfully. "You know I have loved you from the first moment that we met at school; you know that I have left home and friends for you, and steeped myself in crime at your bidding; and you know that you have given me hope that some day you would be my wife. I ask it now."

Dora gave him one of her sweetest smiles. She saw her way clear for the present!

"That cannot be, Allan. Did you never guess why I wanted my sister and Henry Vinton out of the way?"

"I never cared, only that I pleased you," he said, recklessly. "Now I want to know why this cannot be?"

"I am a wife already, Allan."

He started back, and the agony of his look almost made her pity him.

"Whose?" he demanded, hoarsely.

"Norman Vinton's."

He groaned in anguish, and staggered toward his horse. She followed him.

"Allan."

He turned his face to hers, for the voice was very low and sweet.

"If at any time within a year my husband should die—"

"Back! you accursed temptress!" he thundered, "or I shall forget that you are not of my sex. Leave me!"

He vaulted into the saddle, and dashed away, the most reckless being that God's sun shone upon that day.

Dora gazed after him in fear and surprise. It was so unlike him.

"Faugh! he'll only kill himself, perhaps, and that will be the end of him."

She turned and went into the house.

She had only spoken the wish of her heart, when she uttered that falsehood to Allan Wentworth. It was strange, knowing her as well as he did, that he should believe her; yet it was not impossible. Ever since she became convinced that Henry Vinton was beyond her reach, she had cherished a hope that she might have better success with the father, weak, suffering, almost crazy though he was. He was not less sane than she with all her blooming health, but she was the more cunning. She already had a power over him that he could not resist, and she was only waiting to satisfy herself that she could hope no more from Henry. She heard of his death, and the time had come.

After the singular interview with Allan Wentworth, she went to the library. Norman Vinton was sitting by the window, looking out upon the autumn landscape. He looked up with a pleased smile when Dora made her appearance.

"You have been gone a long time, Dora. I get so lonesome."

"But a little while," said she, with a loving caress, "yet it seemed so long to me. How do you feel this morning?"

"No better," said he, sadly. "My days are numbered. The doctor tells me that I am not long for this world. How lonely! There is not one to mourn for me."

"You forget me," said Dora.

"Do you then, care for such a wreck, my child?"

"You have been very good to me," said she, with the same look of love that had won Henry Vinton from Ella's side.

He saw it, and understood it. Nothing that she could have done would have given him such a realizing sense of his entire failure to achieve the happiness, the power, the fame, which had been his aim. A miserable failure.

"Why not?" he thought, as he sat gazing at Dora.

"I have not long to live, and she will always be near to comfort me until the dreaded end. I will! I will!"

It was a great triumph to the scheming woman, but she felt insecure until man's edict made them man and wife.

Norman Vinton cared not how soon, so Dora commenced preparations at once.

It was to be a quiet affair. Mr. Vinton was too weak for excitement, and Dora, half-ashamed of the invalid bridegroom, desired no display until after the wedding. So the priest was brought from the neighboring town, and with only the Arrancart household to witness it, the ceremony commenced.

But Dora's triumph was not yet.

The work was but half done, when Norman Vinton gave a shriek of terror, and sunk senseless to the floor at the very feet of his bride.

Full well the disappointed woman knew the cause of this sudden fright, and turning her eyes toward the door, she beheld the shadowy terror which had so long cursed Norman Vinton.

The other inmates of the room followed her example, and when they saw the dreaded phantom, they cowered in the corner of the room until the specter vanished.

Dora sprang to the door and bolted it. Then, with unspoken curses, she set about the resuscitation of Norman Vinton.

CHAPTER XXV.

LIGHT!

ELLA waited anxiously for the return of Captain Harding's party, but a week passed and no tidings.

She was sitting one day by the window of the little cottage, thinking of Henry and Meta, as indeed she had been ever since they left her, when she was startled by a bugle-call, and looking up the street, she saw a body of cavalry entering the village.

At the head of the battalion rode a tall, noble-looking officer, sitting on his horse with the utmost ease and grace, but neither turning his head to the right or left. He halted his men beneath the trees of a grove just opposite the cottage, and within fifteen minutes, a little city of tents sprung up like magic.

"Colonel Rodney wants to know if we can get water here for supper?"

A soldier, with a bucket on each arm, had approached the window where Ella was sitting, and asked this question.

"Colonel Paul Rodney?" she asked, quickly.

"Yes, marm; the best officer in the army."

Ella forgot about the water, and the man asked again.

"Oh, I will see."

She ran back into the kitchen.

"I may as well say yes," said the woman, in reply to Ella's question about the water. "They will have it anyhow. See there!"

Sure enough, the old well-sweep was creaking up and down, and the soldier was filling his pails.

Ella went out to him.

"You can have the water."

"Yes, thank you," said the soldier, with a merry twinkle in his eye. "I knew I could, so I thought I would be drawing it to save time."

He seemed, however to be in no hurry, for he was unnecessarily slow. He loved to look at the bright, pretty face. Perhaps it reminded him of some dear one at home.

"Do you think Colonel Rodney will come over here if I send for him?" asked Ella, as he took up his buckets and moved off.

"Certainly, marm. I'll tell him when I go back. Shall I give him your name?"

"He does not know me," said Ella; "but, for fear he may not want to come, tell him that I have seen Captain Vinton."

"Captain Vinton? You have? He is my captain. Is he alive and well?"

"Yes; he was a week ago."

"Bully! I'll have the colonel over here in a jiffy."

The soldier hurried back with the glad tidings, regardless of the slopping water which half-filled his buckets. He spoke to a comrade here and there, and presently there arose three rousing cheers from the whole regiment. Ella felt a pardonable pride at this homely tribute to Captain Vinton's worth, and wished that he could be there himself to see it.

Colonel Rodney had looked on approvingly; and when the demonstration was over, he hastened to Ella.

"You have seen, Captain Vinton?" said the colonel, kindly. "Pardon my eagerness, but we have been very anxious about him."

"Nay, colonel, I like your eagerness," said Ella, warmly.

"Then you must class Captain Vinton among your friends," said the colonel.

"The very dearest friend I have," said Ella, frankly.

"Then you are Ella Martin of whom I have heard him speak so often?" said Paul, rising, his face beaming with pleasure.

"Yes, sir," said Ella, with a pretty color stealing over her face.

"I need not tell you how pleased I am to meet one who is so dear to Henry Vinton, and I know that you left him well, by the happiness that I see in your face."

"Yes, colonel, although I am somewhat anxious now. But I must tell you the whole story."

She related the whole in as few words as possible, reserving the names of George Matthews and Meta for the last.

When she told of the dastardly conduct of Matthews, the colonel fairly shook with indignation.

"The miscreant!" he exclaimed. "I know him well. But, you speak of a companion; where is she now?"

"Captain Vinton and Captain Harding are in quest of her now. George Matthews slipped away during the fight, and took Meta with him."

"Meta!" cried the colonel, starting from the chair. Then his face assumed a cold, stern expression that was very painful to Ella.

She went over to him and placed her hand upon his arm.

"You knew her once, Colonel Rodney?"

"Yes, once," he said, bitterly.

Then Ella thought of the strange words which Matthews had used. She shrunk from the task, but it was Meta that she was battling for.

"Colonel Rodney, have you seen George Matthews since you left Willhampton?"

"Not once."

"Did he ever say anything to you about Meta?"

"Never."

"Then it was a base falsehood!" cried Ella, stamping her little foot upon the floor. "Oh, the wretch!"

Colonel Rodney looked his surprise.

"I can not tell you now," said Ella, assuming a playful manner. "But you must not look so black when I speak of Meta. She is a dear girl, and spoke often of you."

Paul's manner softened a little.

"I almost knew you by her description of you."

"Ah!"

"She has many a time expressed a wish to see you again. Would you like to see her?"

This direct charge was so entirely unexpected, that he hardly knew how to answer; but, after a moment's thought, he resolved to reply frankly.

"Ella, it has been the dearest thought of my life that I might meet Meta again."

"She is waiting for you," said Ella, with a glad smile.

A joyous light broke over Colonel Rodney's face at these words, and he pressed the dear girl's hand so warmly.

"How much I thank you, Ella. She has told you something of my life, and you know that I could not tell her how dear she was to me, until I felt worthy of her. Then came that awful blow that sent me away dishonored. I lost all hope then for awhile; but I will yet clear my name of the foul suspicion."

"She knows that you are not guilty," said Ella, determined to bring these two together.

"The world must know it, too," he replied. "But tell me of Meta. Why she left Willhampton, and how the time has passed since."

Ella readily complied, and Paul thought he would never tire of listening. Of course she knew nothing of Doctor James Martin's revenge. That was Meta's secret. Might it not yet keep these two apart?

"I could listen all day," said Colonel Rodney, as he arose to go; "but I must not waste time. Meta is in peril, perhaps, and I must hasten to the rescue."

At daylight the next morning, the battalion was ready to move, and Ella, who was up betimes, watched them gallop out of sight, going to the rescue!

CHAPTER XXVI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

DORA MARTIN worked faithfully to bring Norman Vinton back to life, and her efforts were at last crowned with success.

"You are better, now," said she, lifting his head into her lap.

But he had not recovered from his fright.

"Where is it? where is it?" he asked, looked wildly about the room.

"Dear Norman, you have been dreaming," said she, soothingly. "There was nothing—is nothing to harm you. You fainted from weakness. There, now you can sit in a chair, and I will stand at your side."

"No, no, no," he said, firmly. "It never can be."

"Oh, Norman!" said she, reproachfully, "it will kill me!"

"My dear child, I can not wrong you so. I have sinned most wickedly; but not this—not this!"

"It must be," she answered, vehemently. "It must!"

He only shook his head sadly.

"It shall!" she cried.

Then she whispered something in his ear that made him reel and faint—the one word—*murder!*

"Who told you that?" he gasped.

"You told me that this must not go on," said she, with a burning light in her dark eyes. "Dare you tell me so now? Say quick! shall it be priest or sheriff?"

"God have mercy!" cried the stricken man.

"Must it be?"

"It must!" said Dora, coldly.

"The priest! quick!"

"Come, sir, we are ready again," said Dora, exultingly.

And the priest, gazing with mingled astonishment and fear, stepped forward to do her bidding.

While this scene was enacting in the library, a troop of horses had halted at the gate in front of Arrancourt. We recognize Henry Vinton and Ella and Captain Harding; but Meta was not there. No trace of her nor of George Matthews had they found, and they were returning sore-hearted to the regiment.

It had been decided to leave Ella at Arrancourt; and while the command halted, Captain Vinton and Ella rode up to the mansion.

Ella went to her own room, finding every thing just as she had left it; but Henry passed on to the library. The door was locked, and he rapped loudly.

The door was opened by Mr. Martin, and Captain Vinton stepped into the room.

Dora looked up and met his gaze, but not a muscle of her face betrayed the agitation she felt. He was like one risen from the dead, yet so remarkable was her self-control, that she bowed and smiled, while at the same time she motioned for the ceremony to go on.

Captain Vinton was at a loss to comprehend the meaning of this singular scene, but when the clergyman again essayed to perform the ceremony, Henry stepped up to him and sternly forbade.

"Go on!" cried Dora. "You have no right to interfere!"

Henry turned to his father with a questioning look.

"It must go on, Henry," said he, despairingly.

"No earthly power can stop it."

Without another word Henry strode from the library, and waited outside until he knew, by the noise in the room, that they were husband and wife. Then he called Mr. Martin.

Not a word was said about the marriage—not a reproach uttered, but he led the old man to Ella's room. His knock was answered by Ella, and the father and child fell sobbing into each other's arms.

He waited until the father had recovered from his surprise; then he spoke:

"Mr. Martin, I have found your daughter and returned her to you. I claim her as my own, but I leave her in your care for a brief time, and I charge you to cherish the trust."

"God willing, Henry, I will keep her from all harm," said the old man, fervently.

Then Henry took an affectionate leave of Ella, and hastened out to rejoin his comrades, without a word of adieu to his father or his father's wife.

Wife! How the thought rankled in his bosom as he strode from the house, and leaped into the saddle; and how the men stared at his anguished face, and wondered what he had seen in that grand old house to change him so.

"It is the parting with Ella," thought Captain Harding, "and partly the sad news for the colonel. I wish we had found her."

So no questions were put to Henry, and he volunteered no information, but took his place by Captain Harding's side, and the troops moved on.

They had ridden but a few miles when they saw a cloud of dust in advance, indicating the approach of another party. Captain Harding halted, and made preparations to meet the advancing cavalry, whether friends or foes.

On they came, halting within rifle-shot; and when the dust had cleared away, Captain Harding's party gave a glad shout of welcome, for they recognized Colonel Paul Rodney.

Each party now advanced, and there were glad greetings, and questions that could not be answered in a week's time.

"You have not found her?" asked Colonel Rodney.

"I mean—"

"We have not found Meta," said Henry, sadly.

"Nor we," was the colonel's reply. "And we must give up the search now, for we are ordered to Washington without any delay. Fall in."

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE PRINCE OF DOGS.

WHEN George Matthews found the tide of battle turning against him, he began to think of escape. But he could not leave without one more effort to retain Meta in his possession. He watched an opportunity, and when the combatants were shrouded with dust and smoke, he grasped the now hopeful girl, and before she was aware of his intentions, she was on a horse with him and galloping away.

It was then too late to cry for help, for her captor had bound a handkerchief over her mouth. She felt but little fear, however, for she doubted not that her friends would soon discover her absence, and come to the rescue.

George Matthews took his way down the ravine, notwithstanding the roughness of the path. He urged his overladen horse over the uneven ground at a speed that threatened to unhorse them every moment; but he was a good rider and desperate.

At last the faithful animal could go no further. He had been slackening his pace for some time, yet his master urged him with whip and spur until further efforts were useless. He jumped to the ground, taking Meta with him, and the horse fell over on his side, completely exhausted.

"It won't do to leave him alive," muttered Matthews. "He may wander up in sight, and bring them all after me."

Drawing his knife, he dispatched the poor horse at once. Then grasping Meta's hand, he hurried her along through the tangled bush, dragging and carrying her by turns.

After a weary hour of this traveling, in which the poor girl's feet became bruised and sore, her hands and face scratched and bleeding, and her clothing rent in a hundred places, they came to a river.

Then George Matthews spoke to her for the first time since starting.

"I have eluded them, Meta," he said, triumphantly. "They may search all they please, but they can not overtake us now."

He removed the handkerchief from her mouth, but she only gave him a look of cold disdain.

"Your scorn is ill-timed," said he, starting toward the water, and taking her with him.

She saw a boat there; and when he bade her enter it, she obeyed, knowing how useless resistance would be.

"I hope you will keep the boat right side up," said she, ironically, for, with all her terror, she could not get over her scorn.

"You will not have Paul Rodney to rescue you if I do not," he replied, hotly, as he stepped in and took the oars.

"Then I may as well make up my mind to help myself, sir robber."

"Robber!" he shouted, his face livid with rage.

"I know no better name to call you," she returned, provokingly cool and haughty.

He choked back the angry words that rose to his lips, for he saw Meta's eyes light up with joy as she gazed toward the shore they had just left. Somewhat alarmed, for he was not yet out of rifle-range, he quickly turned his gaze in the same direction, and was very much relieved when he saw nothing but a bloodhound following along the shore. He drew his revolver, but Meta comprehended his purpose, and struck it from his hand into the water.

"Coward!" she exclaimed. "Do you war upon nothing but women and domestic animals?"

He drew back abashed; for with all his wickedness, it was of a negative kind, that might be kept in subjection by a loving hand.

He resumed his rowing, sending the boat to the other side of the stream, while Prince trotted along the shore, keeping them in sight. Meta grew more hopeful. One faithful friend had not lost sight of her. Might he not be the forerunner of others?

Silently the two sat in the boat, George rowing steadily all the while, and gazing at the beautiful face of the woman as she looked hopefully at the opposite shore. What were his thoughts? Good ones, perhaps, for his face grew kindlier as he gazed and thought; and once he laid down his oars to rig an

awning to shield Meta from the burning sun. She looked up in surprise, but when she saw the changed look she thanked him.

George kept on his way until an hour or more after sunset. Then he struck across the stream and landed.

"We are now safe from all pursuit, Meta," said he, more respectfully than he had yet spoken. "We will pass the night on shore, and resume our journey in the morning."

"Where are you taking me?" she asked.

"Where I can have you all to myself, Meta. Where I can love you with a love that knows no equal in the wide world. Oh, Meta! you know not this passion which drives me into all manner of wickedness, that I may possess the object! You, dear Meta, have the power to make me a man or a demon. Which shall it be? Let me know my doom!"

He was kneeling at her feet, and grasping her hand so firmly that she could not withdraw it. She looked down at his burning face, and knew that his words were sincere, however differently she might interpret them. Yet she could only speak the truth, though it imperiled her life.

"George Matthews," she said, kindly, but firmly, "the way you have chosen will never win a woman's love; and you have gone so far that I can never feel aught but repulsion for you. I say it in all kindness, but I can not perjure myself even to save my own life. Forget me. Take me out of this wilderness, and let me go my way. I will forget and forgive your insults and injustice, if you will take me away from here and leave me forever."

"Never! never!" he hissed, with a terrible oath, as he sprung to his feet. "I have given you your last chance! You will never hear my pleadings again! But I swear that you shall be mine, and I will seal my vow with a kiss."

His horrid fury struck Meta motionless, and not until she felt his polluting arm about her waist did she rouse to action. Then she struggled with the energy of despair, shouting all the while for help.

Help? In that wilderness? But help was near for all that. Pat-pat-pat went the bloodhound's soft feet over the ground, and then there was a tiger-like spring, and the sharp teeth were fastened in George Matthews's arm, freeing Meta. She flew to the boat, jumped in, and seized an oar to push off; but she could not leave Prince. She called him, and he came bounding to her, and springing into the boat, crouched at her feet.

Then she pushed off, and the current caught the skiff and bore her down the stream, away from that sickening sight which Prince had left.

In comparative safety, and weak and exhausted, she fell asleep, the dog watching over her.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE HOSPITAL REVELATION.

META slept in her floating couch until the morning sun, shining full in her face, awoke her. She started up, and gazed about her at the broad field and comfortable farm-houses, still under the effects of the bewilderment of her awakening; but when her look fell upon Prince, wide awake, and looking up to her so intelligently, it all came back to her in its most hideous aspect. She had, however, escaped, and was free once more to go where she pleased; yet Doctor James Martin's revenge—his curse—had not left her. She was yet nameless, homeless and friendless.

Right before her was a city, and she was slowly drifting toward it. It seemed not far away, yet she almost hoped that she might never reach it. Would she find a home there? Yes, in the streets! She gazed and wondered, and racked her dizzy brain in her vain attempts to penetrate the future. How dark it looked—growing darker and darker all the while, for ever ringing in her ears were the words, "nameless, homeless, friendless," and those that came after.

"What have I done?" she murmured: "what, that I should find no peace, no rest in all the wide world? Father! mother! where are you that you do not come to me, and relieve my bursting heart and my tortured brain?"

She looked down into the deep, dark waters of the Potomac. But one more pang like the last, and she would have thrown herself into the depths, and bid adieu to earth; but, Paul's face seemed looking up to her out of the turbid element—his voice seemed calling to her—his arm seemed drawing her back.

"No! no! no! I must never do that!" she murmured. "Only cowards flee from life. I'll brave all; reproach, insults, ignominy, every thing rather than take my own life."

She seized an oar, and, with the little skill she had acquired at Willhampton, she worked the boat out of the current toward the shore. Past small boats like her own, past ships, steamboats and vessels of war, heeding not the stares and the shouts, she kept on her way and touched the shore at last. With hearty thankfulness she stepped ashore, leaving the boat to whoever might take it, and, followed by Prince, dragged her way through the streets of the National Capital.

Weak, faint and hungry, she knocked timidly at the door of a house and begged for bread. Once she would have starved ere she stooped to this; but for some reason the love of life had grown strong within her. The veil that hid the future was not lifting, but a brightness shone through it that she never saw before, revealing nothing, but promising much.

"Something to eat?" repeated the kind-faced woman. "Certainly, my child. It is not often any one goes away hungry from my door; nor shall they while I have to give. Come in and rest, for you look as if you would drop. Bring the dog, too. He's a noble-looking fellow."

How much good the kind words did: almost as

much as the fragrant coffee, and the light, crisp biscuits. And how reluctantly she arose to go.

"You aren't going?" asked the woman. "You don't look able to stir. Stay with me, dear, to-day and rest. You are welcome."

Meta hesitated. The temptation was very strong. "You are very good to me," she said. "I really do not feel able to walk."

"I knew it, child. Come right in here, and lie down."

Meta was only too glad, for she was weary of body and mind.

It was quite late in the afternoon when she awoke, feeling much better for the rest. The interval until supper-time was taken up by Meta in recounting her capture and escape, and never had narrator a better listener.

"Perfectly wonderful!" exclaimed the good woman. "And this dog did all that? Why, if I had him, I wouldn't take a hundred dollars for him; but I suppose he will eat as much as a pig."

After this outburst of enthusiasm, Meta made inquiries about employment. Perhaps the mention of Prince's capacity for victuals reminded her that her purse was empty.

"I know of but one place," replied the lady. "John—that is my boy—was saying this morning that nurses were scarce at the hospital. Would you like such a place?"

"I really do not know," replied Meta. "I can try it."

"I will speak to John when he comes. Here he is now."

John proved to be a sergeant in the infantry, and on duty at the hospital. In answer to his mother's question as to the probability of procuring a situation for Meta, he said there was not the least doubt but that she could get one; and readily offered to go up with her in the morning. Meta thanked him and accepted his escort.

The situation was easily obtained, but there were many objections to Prince, who could not be induced to leave Meta; and it was only by telling how he had rescued her, that the faithful dog was allowed to remain.

How strange it all seemed to her; but as she looked at the long rows of beds, on each of which lay a poor soldier suffering for love and care, she forgot herself. How her tender heart bled for them. Lacking skill, she made up the deficiency by kindness and sympathy.

How those lonely, suffering men—not one of them so lonely as she—stared when she first appeared among them, followed by Prince. She seemed so like a ray of sunlight bursting in upon them. How they watched her passing from one to another, with a gentle word and a smile that were worth more to them than all the drugs. How they looked for her coming, and murmured a "God bless your sweet face!" when she was there; and when she went away, they thought of her until she came again.

And Meta found pleasure in this self-sacrificing work. It opened her eyes to the fact that her lot was indeed blessed compared to the misery she saw around her, and she went cheerfully about her duties.

She had been there a week when another sufferer was brought into her ward. Not that there was any thing singular about this, for they were brought in every day, but the man was no stranger. It was George Matthews.

All the happiness went out of her face, then, and a crushing weight seemed laid upon her heart. There were fears, too, and doubts as to her proper course. Should she remain and nurse him back to health and life? Or, should she flee ere he saw her? It was a struggle between fear and duty, and duty prevailed.

George could scarce believe his eyes when he saw the beautiful face bending over him, and her voice speaking to him in kindly tones.

"Good heavens!" he articulated, in a feeble voice; "Meta, is it you, come to nurse me back to life?"

"Yes, George."

"God, I am thankful!" he murmured, between the choking sobs. "Meta, while lying there in that deep wood where your faithful dog left me—while lying there to die—I thought over my past life, and I made a solemn promise that if my life was spared, I would make amends for my sins."

How rapidly Meta's thoughts ran over the time from their first meeting until she left him, as he said, to die. How every word that he uttered came back to her. How she longed to ask him one question, but she could not. And he was lying there waiting for her to speak, yet what could she say?

"Meta, you do not seem pleased," he said, reproachfully.

"Oh, George! you do not know how pleased I am!" said she, bursting into tears; "but—"

The blush that unconsciously overspread her face told George what was in her thoughts.

"Oh, Meta," he cried, "I thought I loved you, but it was nothing—nothing to the love I feel for you now—"

Meta drew away and looked coldly at him.

"Nay, Meta, do not misjudge me now. I am not what I was. I thought only of my own pleasure then; now my greatest pleasure is in seeing you happy. I lied to you about Paul Rodney. He was innocent of the crime that drove him away; and I know nothing of your secret only that you have one; but whatever it is, I know that you are the noblest, purest woman that ever lived. I will see Paul when I get off this sick bed, and if I can bring you two together again, it will be all that I can ask. Meta, I have your forgiveness?"

"Yes, yes," she cried, joyfully.

"I wish I could forgive myself," he said, sadly.

With a sister's care, Meta tended the remorseful man; and when he was able to travel she went with

him, for she had a yearning to see her dear foster-parents again. She never doubted, but with a child's trust looked forward to the happy meeting.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE RECORD CLEARED.

We have passed lightly over Colonel Paul Rodney's war record, for history claims that, but no one who saw him enter Washington, at the head of his war-worn veterans, could doubt, for a moment that he had seen "active service." Of the thousand men or more that went out with him, less than one-third returned:

He cast his eyes over the remnant of as brave a regiment as ever went into the field, and a feeling of sadness came over him. He, who had cared so little for life, had passed through all unscathed, while all around him, fathers, brothers, sons and husbands, had been cut down in the dread strife, carrying sorrow and distress to many a home. Who would have mourned for him? And now the survivors were going to meet the loved ones. Who would meet Paul, the hero, the loved commander? Who would welcome him?

"I feel lost," said he, to Henry Vinton, as they walked arm-in-arm to the hotel. "My men are all leaving me, and I have no one to care for but myself. Where shall I go? and what shall I do to make me forget my loneliness? I shall yet search for Meta, but the fear that I shall not find her almost deters me from the attempt."

Henry was pained by his utter sadness.

"Come with me, Paul," said he. "Come to Arancourt. You will always find a welcome there as long as I live."

"Perhaps I will, Henry; but I must first go to Willhampton. You know why I left there? Ah! I was crazy then, but I can see through it all now. I must go back and see Charles Matthews, and good Mrs. Matthews. She seems like a mother to me; and I went away without a word to her."

Henry waited awhile, and then said:

"After that you will come?"

"Yes; thank you, Henry I will come over for a few days."

Charles Matthews was sitting in his library, conversing with another gentleman, when Paul Rodney—or Colonel Rodney, for he was yet in military dress—was shown into the room.

The banker stared in surprise, and a stern look came over his face as he arose, and, with chilling courtesy offered Paul a chair.

"To what am I indebted for this unexpected visit, Mr. Rodney?"

Paul was chilled by his coldness, but he replied, frankly:

"I can hardly tell you, unless I express it by the one word hope."

"I am at a loss to know, Mr. Rodney, what you can hope for here," said the banker; for, at sight of Paul, all his bitterest feelings came back to him.

Paul sat a moment, hardly believing that it was Charles Matthews who spoke; then he arose, and without a word, stepped to the door.

"Colonel Rodney!"

It was the stranger, whom the banker had not introduced, that called to Paul. He had been gazing steadily into Paul's face, as though it were a very study for him.

Paul stopped with his hand on the latch.

"Do you recognize me, colonel?"

"Never, to my knowledge, have I ever seen you before," said Paul, after closely scanning his features.

"Neither have I ever seen you before," was the somewhat unexpected reply.

"What?" exclaimed the banker, starting from his chair. "You never saw him before?"

"Never in my life, my friend. There is a terrible mistake somewhere, but I think I can see through it."

"Good Lord!" gasped the banker, dropping into his chair, overcome by emotions that were a puzzle to Paul.

He stared from one to the other in questioning surprise.

"You are yet in the dark, Colonel Rodney," said the stranger, "and as I believe I am at the present time, clearer-headed than our friend Matthews, I will try to explain. My name is William Montrose."

"Montrose?" exclaimed Paul, starting forward, for light was breaking through his bewilderment.

"I see that you remember the name, colonel. Mr. Matthews has been telling me of the strange affair following and connected with my settlement at the bank—you know I have but just returned from Europe—and I have been very innocently censuring this Paul Rodney, who proved so recreant to his trust. I now see my mistake and that of Mr. Matthews. You are not the gentleman with whom I transacted the business; but who it was that so maliciously used your name, I do not know. It was a cruel act; and I think if I had him now, I could teach him to impose upon me no more, the villain!"

Paul listened amazed; and the transition from overpowering misery to transcendent joy was more than he could bear calmly. He silently grasped the hand of Mr. Montrose, while a suspicious mist was before his eyes.

"God be praised!" shouted the banker, coming out of his maze. "Paul, my boy, I very humbly ask your pardon. What a fool I was, to be sure."

"I never blamed you, Mr. Matthews," said Paul. "Everything was so against me that you could not believe my unaided statement. But, it is all clear to me now."

"Yes, my dear boy," cried the banker, joyfully; "and we'll bury the past, and let the future bring us happiness. How I have missed you, Paul. Nothing

has gone right since you went away. We lost Meta, and then I sent George away."

Their eyes met, when he spoke the name, but more in sorrow than anger.

Mr. Matthews resumed:

"But we will have it all right again now. You shall take your place at the bank, and I'll have such a jubilee as old Willhampton never saw before. But where's mother? Bless me!"

Instead of ringing the bell for a servant, he hurried away himself in search of his wife. No one but himself should have the honor of telling her the good news. Neither could he wait to surprise her, but from his disjointed exclamations her woman's wit gleaned the facts at once.

The meeting was like the coming together of mother and son; and indeed he seemed a son to her, as she seemed a mother to him.

But there was yet a void: Meta was not there.

"Where is Meta?" he asked.

It seemed a pity to cloud the happiness of the childless old couple, but he only asked the question that they had asked themselves, and each other, a score of times every day since their pet went away. And they gave him the same answer that they had heard so many times from each other's lips.

He said nothing of what he knew of Meta, but mentally resolved to devote his life, if necessary, to a search for the lost one.

He stayed at Willhampton a week; then he set out to fulfill his promise to Henry Vinton, promising the banker a speedy return.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOME AGAIN!

COMING HOME!

How suggestive of joy are these two simple words—joy to the fond mother, the loving wife, the trusting maiden, who have waited so long for the absent ones. Coming home! Spared through all the perils they met, to carry happiness back to the anxious watchers. Alas, how many looked and hoped in vain!

Ella Martin read with joyful heart the welcome news from Henry. It was her first letter from him, and there was a modest glow upon her cheeks as she read the impassioned words over and over again. Were they not penned by him who was dearer to her than all the world beside? No more fears nor doubts, but with perfect faith and trust she awaited his coming.

The marriage of Dora with Norman Vinton made but little change in the everyday life at Arrancourt. To be sure, as mistress of Arrancourt, Dora made some changes, and exerted her authority; but, as before, Norman Vinton required all her time, and she made no complaints.

The invalid was sinking all the while. He kept his bed nearly all the time, and even his young wife's inexperienced eye saw that his days in the world would be few. To say that she feared the dread change would hardly be believed, yet she was not anxious for it. It was the present position of her husband, holding her there in the sick room, when she might be a reigning belle in the circles of fashion and wealth, that was distasteful to her. And she had another reason for desiring his recovery. She had a power over him that would bend him to her will—a power that was less potent over a dying man than over one imbued with hope and health. The foolish woman was not content with her triumph, but must needs stoop to paltry revenge.

Ella, in her goodness and simplicity, never thought of wealth. She loved Henry for himself. Reared at Arrancourt, it seemed that it must always be her home; and as all her modest wants had been supplied in the past, so it seemed that they would be in the future. She had forgiven Dora—for the scheming woman had been very kind to her since her marriage—and she told her of Henry's letter. Dora—perhaps we should say Mrs. Vinton, but it seems more out of place to us than it did even to Ella and her father—expressed much pleasure at the news. Was she, in anticipation of widowhood, plotting again?

It was the first time the sisters had spoken together of Henry since Ella's return, and Dora's seeming interest deceived Ella. She spoke freely, just as she had been wont to do before the strange season of gloom just past, and Dora encouraged her.

They were both standing near the window, but so earnest was their conversation, that a close carriage drew up to the door unnoticed. The sound of the driver's voice reached them, and they both looked in time to see Henry Vinton alighting from the carriage. Ella flew to meet him, and reached the door just as he was ascending the steps. With a cry of joy she threw her arms about his neck, and innocently held up her lips for the kiss of welcome. Ah! had Dora seen this! but she was still at the window watching her recreant sleuth-hound, Prince, as he ran from place to place about the familiar spot.

And she saw another gentleman alight from the carriage, and a lady, both strangers to her, but Ella knew them; and she gave Meta a loving embrace, and exclaimed:

"Meta! Meta! you darling! I am so glad! Where have you been? Oh, we'll keep you now, shall we not, Henry?"

"Certainly, if we can," replied Henry, his face beaming with happiness as he thought of the surprise he would give her and Paul Rodney.

Ella now noticed George Matthews, and she was at a loss how to act. She looked questioningly at Henry and Meta, and Meta quickly said:

"It is all forgotten now."

This was sufficient, and she greeted George kindly, yet somewhat timidly.

Dora now made her appearance.

The meeting was quite embarrassing to Henry, but she passed through the ceremony of introduction with tolerable self-possession. There was a very slight hesitation, however, when he spoke of Dora as Mrs. Vinton. It was so strange, and withal, so repulsive.

Dora, however, was perfectly at ease, and welcomed the party to Arrancourt with charming grace and apparent pleasure. Appreciating the dignity of her exalted position, she was very gracious toward her step-son and his friends; but Henry felt all the while that she was glorying in her triumph.

After a brief space, during which Dora, with consummate tact, put every one at ease, she went with Henry to Norman Vinton's chamber.

The young man was shocked at his father's altered appearance. The face was pale, and thin almost to transparency; the eyes seemed ever changing; hollow as though some invisible power were pulling them back; again, they were full and glaring; and the hair, once black and luxuriant, was thin and bleached; not white nor gray, but of a lifeless, flaxen hue.

"You find me nearly gone," said the invalid, reaching out his hand toward Henry. "A few more days will take me. I should have gone long ago but for Dora. She has kept life in me so that I might see you again."

"No, no, father; we can not let you go," said Henry. "We will have you back to health again, if you will only let us. But you must throw off this despondency."

"No use," said Mr. Vinton, sadly. "I know I must die soon, and I have only been waiting for you. Now I must prepare for the end. Dora, dear, will you leave us for awhile? I have much to say to Henry that must not be delayed."

Dora complied reluctantly, for it seemed to her that she was giving Henry the advantage. What secrets had her husband that she should not know?

"Pen and paper," said Norman Vinton, when the door had closed behind his wife.

Henry went to the desk and got the required articles.

"Now write down every word."

Henry put his pen to the paper, but at the first sentence he started and trembled so that he could not make a mark.

He controlled himself after awhile, and went on with his task.

All the time Dora was waiting in a suspense that was almost past endurance. Just when it seemed that she could not wait another minute, she heard Henry leave the chamber, and lock the door after him. The ominous click of the bolt, as it slid into the socket, made her tremble.

Henry was away but a moment, returning with her father, as she knew by his heavy step along the hall. Then, after another season of waiting, there came a tap at her door.

"Your husband is waiting for you," said Henry.

Husband! why did he speak so? Ah! what would she not have given for the secret? She had lost all power over Henry. Her terrible secret was his.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MYSTERY NO MORE.

THERE could not be gayety in the old mansion while a fellow-being was lying on a bed of sickness, from which he never would rise, but there was quiet peace and happiness. Since Henry was closeted so long with the sick man, he seemed to have received new life; but no allusion to what he learned there was made to any one. Dora sought in every way to glean something from him, but his only reply was:

"Not yet, madam; not yet."

With which she was forced to be content.

George Matthews and Ella had been let into the secret of Paul's promised visit, and it is difficult to say which was pleased the most.

And Henry looked for the colonel at any moment. Although starting from Washington on the same day, Henry's progress was much the slowest. Soon after starting he fell in with Meta and George, and kept with them. As George was yet quite feeble, they were forced to travel slowly, and make frequent stops. Then George became so much fatigued—Henry had whispered to him that Paul Rodney had promised to visit Arrancourt—that it was not a difficult task for Henry to persuade him, and Meta, of course, to halt a few days at Arrancourt, which was not far out of the way. They were just a week reaching there, so Henry had good reason for expecting Paul soon.

The third day after their arrival he saw the well-known form of the colonel riding toward the house, on the same horse that had carried him successfully through many a weary campaign. George, Meta and Ella were in the room, but did not see the new arrival, and Henry slipped quietly out of the house, and grasped the colonel's hand just as he alighted.

"Come right in just as quick as you can," whispered Henry. "I am planning a surprise."

He hurried him past the parlor door, and up to his own room.

"There, Paul, now if you have any fixing to do—but I do not know what you can do to improve your appearance—hurry it up, for I am anxious to present you to the ladies."

The party in the parlor saw the colonel's horse as the hostler led it to the stables, and Ella recognized it, but said nothing. Meta admired the beauty of the animal, and George guessed who had come. While yet talking about it, Henry threw open the door and announced:

"Colonel Paul Rodney."

Volatile Ella clapped her hands with delight, but Meta was so surprised that for a moment she hardly knew what to do or say. Paul was waiting for his cue from her, and when she arose with a manner positively glacial, he advanced as cold as she; yet there was a yearning look in his fine eyes that made her poor heart throb painfully.

Ella was disappointed and showed it plainly.

"Now you have found him, you will drive him away again," she whispered to Meta, while Paul was bowing distantly to George.

Meta gave Ella an imploring look, but how could she understand it? She knew nothing of the gulf between these two.

George was also disappointed, and sorrowfully he left the room. With all his self-denial he had not made Meta happy.

Soon after George left, a servant called Henry and Ella out. It seemed like a preconcerted plan, but it was not. However, it left Paul and Meta together, unexpectedly giving him the opportunity he had wished for. It had come so suddenly, however, that he was wholly unprepared for it; yet, with a promptness that was a leading characteristic with him, he accepted the situation, and frankly opened his heart to the trembling woman.

For a moment all doubts were banished from his mind, for she did not attempt to withdraw the hand which he had taken; then, all unexpectedly, she sprang from him, and when he arose to follow her, she waved him back and tried to speak.

He waited in such an agony of suspense. If he had known her thoughts, how he would have pitied her. A vision was passing before her eyes. She saw Doctor James Martin just as he stood that night; she felt his grasp upon her wrist; and she heard his words just as he whispered them, even to the hissing tones. That was all that held her back; that was what strained her heart-strings till they were ready to snap asunder. Yet she could not speak. The words died on her lips, while her eyes were revealing that love which she was striving so hard to crush.

Perhaps Paul understood something of her feelings. He said nothing, fearing that should he break the spell, she would find speech, and utter the dread word. Until then there was hope.

Thus they stood when Ella ran into the room, but she paid no attention to the singularity of their position. With terror-fraught visage, she whispered to Meta:

"Norman Vinton is dying! He is calling for Meta. Can it be you?"

What a flash of hope passed over Meta's face. She found speech then.

"Wait, Paul, till I come back," she said. Then she hurried to the chamber of death.

Why did she start and grasp Ella's arm when she saw the face of the dying man? Ah! her words soon told what Dora, standing there by the bedside, should have seen long before:

"Doctor James Martin!"

What sickening terror that name struck to the heart of Dora, the young wife. She bent over her husband and took one look at his face. Yes, it was her uncle James. The coloring on his hair had faded, and all that was needed to make him as she saw him in New York, were the green spectacles. Without a word, but with such despair and woe depicted on her beautiful face, that none could look upon her without pity, she turned away.

The dying man opened his eyes when he heard his name, and looked at Meta.

"Poor girl!" he murmured. "Put your ear to my lips, Meta."

Meta quickly bent down.

"You are Meta Vinton, Norman's child," he whispered. "Your brother Henry knows everything but that. Tell him now, before I die."

Meta sprang to Henry's side, and whispered the joyful words to him.

"Is this so, James Martin?" he asked, striding to the bedside. "Is Meta my sister?"

"Yes, Henry," said Doctor James.

"God be praised!" murmured the brother, pressing Meta to his breast; and her silent prayer of thankfulness was none the less fervent.

Oh! ought not the dying man to be forgiven after causing such joy?

There was a witness to this scene which none in the chamber had yet noticed. It was the shadowy terror of Arrancourt; but how unlike she was to the dreaded phantom which had been such a terror to the man who was now passing away. A pleasant-faced woman in black, with eyes so like Meta's, and traces of beauty which the misery of a score of years had not eradicated.

George Matthews saw her first, and he exclaimed:

"Mrs. Morehouse!"

The lady nodded to him, and then drew near the bed. James Martin saw her.

"Do not reproach me, Meta Vinton!" said he. "You have had your revenge. I murdered your husband, and took your children from you; but look! I restore them to you. Would to God I could also give Norman back to you! Then I could die happy. Forgive me, Meta, forgive!"

Doctor James Martin never spoke again. The last act in a wasted life was one of atonement.

There was a hushed and awful stillness in the chamber while the life of Doctor James Martin was quietly passing out of the wasted body; then all but Moses Martin turned away, sorrowful, but not mourning the loss. But where was the young wife—the beautiful woman who had risked so much and lost all? Gone; no one knew when or whither.

And all this while Paul Rodney was waiting—waiting, wavering between hope and despair. He heard a rustling of garments, and ere he turned his head, Meta stood beside him. No more doubting; no

more the child of shame; but radiant and happy, with a home, a name, and so many friends. No words were needed to tell Paul of his happiness, but Meta put her hand in his, and whispered so softly: "Yes, Paul."

An hour later there was a sad, yet interested group sitting in the great parlor at Arrancourt, listening to Mrs. Vinton, as she made clear many things which were mysterious.

"I knew Doctor James Martin," said she, "before I married Norman Vinton. He sought my hand in marriage, and my refusal made him my enemy. But I saw nothing of him until we met in Europe. Norman was sick, and Doctor James was the only physician we could reach. He attended my husband and *poisoned him*. Then he fled, taking my two children. My nerves were weak from anxiety and long watching at Norman's bedside, and the double shock was more than I could bear. I grew partially deranged, and wandered from place to place. In my lucid intervals I invariably planned to bring the murderer of my dear husband to justice, but ere I was able to accomplish much, my reason would leave me again, undoing all I had done."

"I adopted a child, hoping that the care might be beneficial. I assumed my maiden name, Morehouse, and gave Walter the name, too. I grew better under the influence of his love, and when he was eighteen we came to America. I went to Willhampton, determined to wait until I was sure that I had strength to go on with the work I had so often attempted."

Walter was taken with a desire to go to California, and I reluctantly consented. All went well for a while. Walter sent me sufficient money for my simple wants, but suddenly the remittances were stopped. Then came a letter, stating that he had sent some money by a Mr. Paul Rodney, but I never received it."

Here George Matthews quickly arose, and begged leave to interrupt her one moment.

"The money is now in the bank at Willhampton," said he; "put there by Paul Rodney himself soon after you went away. Why he was delayed, we will leave to be told another time."

"Thank you, Mr. Matthews. I have always felt hard about that money, for it was the last that Walter ever sent me that I know of. It was but a few months afterward that a letter advised me of Walter's death."

"On the same day, or rather during the night following, there came a rap at my door; and, on going to see who was there, I met Doctor James Martin."

"What followed after that I can not tell positively, for it all seems like a dream, until I stood in the death chamber to-day. As I look at it now, my first recollection is of standing in the door of that very room, and seeing Doctor James Martin on the bed, and an assassin standing with drawn knife over him. Then I was in another chamber. Ella was sleeping peacefully, while a woman stood ready to take her life. That woman I do not see here now, but it seems that I have met her since."

The listeners looked from one to another, for they all felt that she referred to Dora.

"After this," resumed Mrs. Vinton, "everything is so confused that I will not attempt to relate it."

Following Mrs. Vinton, were explanations from Paul and Meta, and from Mr. Martin, taking up the entire day.

And here will we leave them, and pass over the interval to the present.

Paul Rodney and Meta now live at Willhampton in an elegant mansion adjacent to Charles Matthews's home; and Paul manages the banking business just as Charles Matthews hoped he would. George is there, too, a truly penitent man, and nobly trying to make amends for his past errors.

Henry Vinton and Ella live at Arrancourt with Mrs. Vinton. And we must not omit Prince. He has the liberty of the estate, an honored retainer, but growing old, as we all are doing.

Dora never returned to her father, for the insanity which we must charitably believe influenced her in her career of crime, assumed a more violent phase, and she now passes her time in an asylum, raving of her disappointments.

Allan Wentworth, her willing tool, broke away from her allurements, and found a soldier's grave. Thus we bid them all good-by.

THE END.

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